

**PSC proposes total restructure of EC to guarantee independence**  
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**By Clara Chooi**

KUALA LUMPUR, April 3 — The parliamentary select committee (PSC) for polls reform has recommended a total revamp of the Election Commission's (EC) structure to ensure its independence, including increasing its enforcement powers, manpower and placing it directly responsible to Parliament.

In the PSC's report tabled to Parliament today, it was recommended that the EC be permitted to hold its own budget and that a "Services Commission" be formed to allow the authority to appoint its own officers.

"This is to ensure the EC's independence will never again be questioned," the PSC report said.

The report also suggested the introduction of a "special services scheme" for EC members.

"The committee also recommends that to reject allegations against the EC's independence, the appointment of the Chairman, Deputy Chairman and EC members must all be similar to the appointments of the Federal Court, Court of Appeal and High Court judges," the PSC said.

At present, Article 114 of the Federal Constitution states that the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, after consultation with the Conference of Rulers, shall appoint the EC members, which includes one chairman, deputy and five other members.

The PSC also took note of the "limited human resources" in the EC currently and its dependence on other authorities in carrying out its functions.

"The committee recommends that based on the EC's burden and wide scope of duties, the EC's organisational structure needs to be revamped to grant it power to ensure that the enforcement of election laws is carried out by its own enforcement division," the PSC said in the report, saying that this would help reduce the EC's dependency on other enforcement agencies.

The PSC added that the EC should also increase its manpower, upgrade current posts as well as provide them with adequate financial allocations "appropriate to the their roles, responsibilities, burdens and current challenges".

Additionally, the panel also suggested that as a "long-term measure", three separate entities should be formed to handle the EC's three functions — to conduct elections; prepare and revise electoral rolls; and review the division of the federation and the states into constituencies and recommend such changes where necessary.

The panel also took note of a suggestion for the total number of seats in the Dewan Rakyat to be balanced proportionally between the peninsula and east Malaysia.

This is in accordance with the Inter-Government Committee (IGC) document on Malaysia's formation in 1963 where it was stipulated that Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore would get 34 per cent of seats in the House.

There are presently 222 parliamentary seats up for grabs.

"The committee recommends that a detailed study is carried out on this suggestion, taking into consideration the principles behind Malaysia's formation," the panel said.

The PSC's 79-page report was passed this afternoon without debate after opposition lawmakers refused to accept the Dewan Rakyat Speaker's decision to reject their motion to include a "minority report" as part of the panel's findings.

The minority report would reflect the views of the panel's three Pakatan Rakyat (PR) members who had disagreed on four of the 22 recommendations presented today.

The nine-member committee, formed last October by Datuk Seri Najib Razak, comprised three PR members, five Barisan Nasional (BN) MPs and one independent lawmaker and was given six months to implement reforms to the country's election system.

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