

PSC tables 22-point report to Parliament
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KUALA LUMPUR, April 3 — The Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) on electoral reforms today tabled its final report to the Dewan Rakyat, listing a total of 22 recommendations for the Election Commission (EC) to improve the country's election process.

Of the total, the nine-man panel had disagreed on four points and unanimously passed 18 others.

The four points that earned "nays" from the three Pakatan Rakyat (PR) lawmakers on the panel are the EC's proposal to expand postal voting to include media personnel and EC workers, a proposal to allow "pre-registration" for voters reaching the age of 20, increasing the minimum campaign period from seven to 10 days and a proposal on automatic voter registration.

According to the report, the PR members had wanted "advanced voting" instead of "postal voting" for EC workers and media personnel.

But their proposal was vetoed by majority vote and the panel finally passed the recommendation to allow both media and EC workers to cast their ballots via post.

PR and civil society groups like Bersih 2.0 have long been rallying for the postal voting system to be entirely scrapped, arguing that it is easily open to abuse and tampering.

PR members in the PSC have also been complaining against allowing media personnel to vote via post, again saying this could be open to abuse.

Following the PSC's final five-hour meeting last Wednesday to finalise its recommendations, one panel source pointed out that PR had wanted the postal voting system scrapped entirely and allowing army and police personnel to cast ballots via "advanced voting" instead.

But instead, said the source, it was recommended that postal voting be expanded to include media personnel.

"What is the definition of media? It could be bloggers who are friendly to BN's side," the source said.

Additionally, said the source, the EC has also increased its number of officers on duty on polling day from 140,000 to 240,000, all of whom would be allowed to vote via post.

PR lawmakers had also disagreed on allowing "pre-registration" for those reaching the age of 20, as they had wanted "automatic registration" for those who reach 18 years of age. Under the panel's "pre-registration" proposal, those reaching the age of 20 would be allowed to register as voters but would only be allowed to vote at the age of 21.

On the length of the campaign period, the opposition MPs had attempted to push for an

extension to 21 days, saying this would give the contesting parties more time to woo voters. But the five-man Barisan Nasional (BN) team on the panel vetoed this and agreed to extend the minimum campaign period from seven to 10 days.

Apart from this, PR members said they had also fought tooth and nail to ensure the current voter registry is cleaned of its many alleged discrepancies but this appeared to be missing from today's final PSC report.

Only under Point 10 of the report was the EC "recommended to prioritise continuous efforts to clean the electoral roll, with the help of the National Registration Department (NRD)".

The report also recommends the formation of a parliamentary select panel to continuously monitor efforts in ensuring a clean electoral roll.

But in a press conference yesterday, PKR MP Azmin Ali, who is a PSC member, had complained that despite this point, "fundamental issues" were not dealt with in the report.

He pointed to the 42,000 "questionable voters" currently listed in the registry whose names could not be matched with the NRD's records.

"The EC themselves had admitted to this," he said.

The bipartisan nine-member PSC was mooted by Datuk Seri Najib Razak last year, months after his administration earned widespread criticisms over its handling of Bersih's second rally for free and fair elections on July 9.

The Malaysian Insider reported this morning claims from Bersih sources that a third rally would likely be held at the end of this month following the PSC's alleged failure satisfy its demands for total reform to the country's election system.

Below is the summarised list of recommendations by the PSC:

1. EC given three months to formulate a mechanism to allow overseas voting for all Malaysians abroad.
2. Media and EC election workers who are on duty during polling day will be allowed to vote via post.
3. EC to study the best voting method for voters residing/working outside of the constituencies they are registered to vote.
4. EC recommended to study a proposal to allow "pre-registration" for those who reach the age of 20 to enable them to become automatic voters at age 21.
5. The PSC recommends that Parliament should only be dissolved after a minimum four-year period and this must be provided for in the law.
6. EC recommended to, within three months of this report, prepare guidelines and a code of conduct for the party that will become the "caretaker government" during an election campaign until a new government is formed.
7. EC recommended to form a special team to enforce laws under its jurisdiction without depending on other authorities like the police, particularly for the receipt of false

information during the voter registration process.

8. EC recommended to extend the minimum campaign period from seven to 10 days.

9. EC recommended to observe Article 115 of the Federal Constitution which can compel any public authority to help to the EC, including the ministry and its related agencies, on matters pertaining to free and fair media access to all contesting parties in an election.

10. EC recommended to prioritise continuous efforts to clean the electoral roll, with the help of the National Registration Department (NRD). PSC recommends that an independent agency like Mimos to help check the roll. PSC recommends the formation of another parliamentary panel to monitor all efforts in checking the roll.

11. EC recommended to put on display the list of "questionable voters" where one address has over 50 registered voters, for 45 days from the date this report is debated. This is to enable the EC to update the voter registry.

12. The PSC recommends that current laws are reviewed to grant the EC the power to remove registered voters from the roll upon receiving valid proof and complaints from sources.

13. EC recommended to study and take action within 12 months of this report the proposal to allow automatic voter registration for those reaching the age of 21.

14. PSC recommends that the EC studies procedures and the regulations of other countries in allowing voters to choose between their birth or registered address or place of employment as their voting address.

15. To strengthen the EC, PSC recommends that the appointments of its chairman, deputy and members are carried out in the same fashion as Federal Court, Court of Appeal and High Court judges; that EC be given the power to have its own budget and is directly responsible to Parliament; and that a Services Commission be formed for the EC to appoint its own officers and a special service scheme formulated for EC staff.

16. PSC recommends that the EC is restructured so that it is given the power to enforce election laws and lessen its dependence on other authorities, that its manpower is increased and current posts given a boost in accordance with its roles and current challenges

17. PSC recommends the government increase human resources, finances and facilities of the Election Academy; the PSC recommends the formation of an advisory board comprising members from NGOs and political parties to advise the academy

18. The PSC recommends that as a long-term effort, the EC's three main functions — conduct elections, manage the electoral roll and review election divisions — be separated to three independent bodies.

19. The PSC recommends that a detailed study is carried out on the distribution of parliamentary seats in Sabah and Sarawak to ensure the states are fairly represented.

20. PSC recommends the EC identify a fair formula to ensure that the number of voters in one constituency in one state does not greatly differ from one to another.

21. The PSC recommends that the government allocates funds to winning political parties

and its candidates, according to the number of seats won in an election and the number of votes garnered.

22. The PSC recommends that the EC review the suggestion to improve the current "first-past-the-post" simple majority system used in elections in Malaysia and consider "proportionate representation".

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