

**PSC: EC can direct ministry to ensure fair media access during polls**  
**The Malaysian Insider**  
**April 3, 2012**  
**By Shannon Teoh**  
**By Clara Chooi**

KUALA LUMPUR, April 3 — The Election Commission (EC) can compel the government to ensure all parties are given free and fair access to the media during an election campaign period, the Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) on polls reform said in its report today.

This, said the panel, is provided for under Article 115(2) of the Federal Constitution, which stipulates that the EC can seek assistance from public authorities to discharge its duties.

"[These public authorities]... include the ministry and its relevant agencies, on matters related to free and fair access to media for all parties and candidates contesting an election," the PSC said in its report.

The panel said it has also taken note of the Information, Communications and Culture Ministry's "readiness" to grant fair media access to all parties and candidates in a poll.

"The committee recommends that the EC observes Article 115(2) of the Federal Constitution," it said.

Article 115(2) on "Assistance to Election Commission" states: "All public authorities shall on the request of the Commission give the Commission such assistance in the discharge of its duties as may be practicable..."

Opposition lawmakers and civil society groups have been rallying for free and fair access to all media during an election campaign period, alleging that the government-owned mainstream media oftentimes tend demonise the opposition in their news coverage.

The PSC also agreed to extend the campaign period to a minimum of 10 days instead of the present seven days under Elections (Conduct of Elections) Regulations 1981.

But this proposal was turned down by the three Pakatan Rakyat (PR) members on the panel, who were pushing for the campaign period to be extended to up to 21 days.

This, they argued, would give sufficient time to the contesting parties to campaign for votes.

But the panel settled on the 10-day period, noting its report here that while it acknowledges the difference of opinion between members, "an overly lengthy campaign period would bring difficulties to campaign activities in certain areas as well as rack up a high cost".

"The committee recommends that the EC takes into consideration all views offered in ensuring that the campaign period, in accordance with laws, would be no shorter than 10 days," said the report.

The bipartisan nine-member poll reform panel was mooted by Datuk Seri Najib Razak last year, months after his administration earned widespread criticism for its handling of Bersih's

rally for free and fair elections on July 9.

After 13 meetings, six public hearings and one fact-finding mission to several foreign countries, the panel finally released its 22-point report to parliamentarians yesterday. Of the 22 recommendations, however, the panel members had disagreed on four points.

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2012 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/psc-ec-can-direct-ministry-to-ensure-fair-media-access-during-polls/>