

EC to be under Parliament's watch, says PM
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KUALA LUMPUR, June 1 — The Election Commission (EC) will be reporting to a parliamentary select committee (PSC) from now, Datuk Seri Najib Razak announced today in a bid to shore up public confidence in the institution's impartiality.

The prime minister said he was transferring his office's responsibility to oversee the election regulator to Parliament where a panel comprising members from both sides of the political divide would help improve its credibility.

"With this step, it is hoped that the EC's independence will no longer be questioned and the people's confidence will be strengthened towards the EC," he was quoted by state news agency Bernama as saying at the Yang di-Pertuan Agong's official birthday celebration in the city.

The election regulator has been accused by opposition politicians of favouring the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) and even helping the 13-party coalition keep its unbroken grip on power for years, but none more so than in the recently-concluded May 5 general election.

The EC, formed in 1957 under the Federal Constitution, has always reported to the Prime Minister's Department.

But Najib was reported to have highlighted today that the regulator is not a government department or agency but a statutory body and whose members receive the same protection as Federal Court judges.

The opposition Pakatan Rakyat (PR) has organised several rallies throughout the country after the contentious May 5 polls, accusing BN of "stealing" the election as the coalition had lost the popular vote for the first time since 1969, but still retained federal power.

BN, which got just under 47 per cent of the popular vote against PR's 51 per cent, won 133 seats in the 222-member Dewan Rakyat while the opposition gained 89.

PKR strategy director Rafizi Ramli said last Monday that PR parties plan to file election petitions in 41 of the 222 federal constituencies — three by the DAP, 20 by PKR and 18 by PAS — before the June 12 deadline, as he showed the press evidence of phantom voters and blackouts during the May 5 general election.

Opposition politicians have also accused the EC of gerrymandering the electoral boundaries to ensure greater weightage to rural constituencies, where support for BN is stronger.

Analysts have pointed to a stark rural-urban split in voter support for the two political pacts in Election 2013, with city dwellers backing PR and voters in the countryside favouring the BN.

The EC is due to redraw the electoral boundaries this year.

Source:

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