

Let Pakatan lead PSC for EC, opposition figures tell Najib
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KUALA LUMPUR, June 2 — The parliamentary select committee (PSC) to oversee the Election Commission (EC) should be led by Pakatan Rakyat (PR) to eliminate any conflict of interest, opposition leaders have said.

In a bid to shore up public confidence in the institution's impartiality, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak had announced yesterday that the EC would be reporting to the PSC from now on, where a panel comprising members from both sides of the political divide would help improve its credibility.

"To assure PR that this exercise has genuine intention of restoring the public's confidence in EC, it should be led by PR," DAP's Election Strategist Dr Ong Kian Ming told The Malaysian Insider here.

According to the director for election watchdog Malaysian Electoral Roll Analysis Project (MERAP), this is because the distrust against the EC is much more prevalent among PR leaders compared to BN leaders.

The election regulator has been accused by opposition politicians of favouring the ruling 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.

"We've seen how for example the PSC on electoral reforms did not amount to any substantive action taken ... One of the reason was because it was led by BN," he said, referring to the committee chaired by Datuk Seri Dr Maximus Ongkili from BN's Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS).

PAS' central working committee member Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad compared the situation to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) in many Commonwealth countries, where it is customary for a member of the opposition party to chair the committee.

In countries that employ the committee, the PAC is usually responsible for monitoring government spending as a way to ensure accountability and transparency.

"Someone who holds an interest in a case cannot judge it," said Dzulkefly, referring to the legal maxim "nemo iudex in causa sua", which literally means "nobody should judge his own case".

According to the PAS man, such interest can be seen in the proposal to reform the "first past the post" system, which currently gives an advantage to the ruling party.

However, PKR vice-president Fuziah Salleh stressed that in order for a PR-led PSC to work, electoral reforms must first be carried out so that the EC is free, fair and independent.

The Kuantan MP also has her reservations that the move might be Najib's way to divert the public's attention from claims of electoral fraud and nullify any faults related to the EC that has been raised by PR.

Since the results of Election 2013 were made official, PR has held "Black505" rallies to protest against alleged electoral fraud even as Barisan Nasional (BN) leaders and analysts criticised the decision.

Its organiser, PKR's Datuk Johari Abdul, stressed today that the rallies will go on until all its demands are met, despite calls by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong for Malaysians to accept the result.

Ong suggested today that members of the PSC should not be ministers who already have their hands full, but should be left to backbenchers instead.

Meanwhile, Dzulkefly even suggested the possibility of a non-partisan expert joining the committee, since the appointment must be made based on merit rather than by the virtue of someone being an MP.

"I suggest not confining the membership to just MPs ... It can also be from academics, researchers, ex-judges," he said.

Earlier yesterday, Najib had said that he was transferring his office's responsibility of overseeing the election regulator to Parliament. The EC, formed in 1957 under the Federal Constitution, has always reported to the Prime Minister's Department.

Najib was also reported to have highlighted yesterday that the regulator is not a government department or agency but a statutory body 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 garnered 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.

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