

Parliamentary Select Committee on Electoral Reforms

Electoral Reform Issues

Background

1. Back in August 2011, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak announced the setting up of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Electoral Reforms (PSC) to remove suspicions of manipulation by the government in the country's electoral process. The move is aimed to dispel misconceptions that the government was against a clean electoral process.
2. Following which, the Dewan Rakyat Selection Committee subsequently endorsed the appointment of nine members for the PSC. 5 members are Barisan Nasional MPs, three opposition MPs and one independent MP.
3. PSC will be chaired by Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Seri Dr Maximus Ongkili. The PSC's task is to study the current electoral process and submit recommendations for improvement. It has been given a six months mandate to submit a report to the Dewan Rakyat.
4. Notwithstanding the aim to remove suspicions of manipulation in the electoral process, the look into the reforms should also be guided by the terms to improve the electoral system to minimise abuse and tightening current weaknesses in the system to prevent people from using these weaknesses to politicise issues.
5. If the Parliament were to be dissolved before the PSC completes its work, the PSC will be dissolved automatically too. Given the Prime Minister's determination in removing all the suspicions and criticisms about the electoral process, even if the PSC were to be dissolved, the better ideas garnered, from the public and working group, up to that point should still be utilized. This further gives people the assurance of the seriousness of the government to dispel all the negative rumours about the current electoral system.

Electoral reform issues

6. This paper looked into 5 areas to form some positions to adopt on the areas concerned. The 5 issues are as follows: -
 - i) Voters' list/registration

- ii) Campaigning period
- iii) First past the post voting system
- iv) Overseas voting
- v) Indelible ink

Voters' list/registration

7. There is also the need for efficient ways to have a periodical system of cleaning up the database to weed out deceased voters and/or those who have relinquished the Malaysian citizenship. Failure to do so, due to miscommunications between agencies, merely provides people the chance to politicise and criticise the local electoral system.
 - i) An open channel should be created between all agencies involved namely the Police and Jabatan Pendaftaran Negara to inform the EC of deaths and issues of citizenships, where applicable.
 - ii) On the EC's part, attempts must be made to verify the latest status of registered voters who have not voted over the past pre-determined number of years or elections.
8. There should not be a need to adopt the automatic voter registration system.
 - i) If a citizen does not want to register manually in the first place, there is not much point in forcing an individual to be in the electoral role through automatic voter registration.
 - ii) Even compulsory voting for that matter, as being practised in some countries. Such an exercise would be seen as a waste of resources.
9. Notwithstanding the re-registration exercise, the EC should cut short the time period required to formalise a new voter's registration. Currently a new voter can only vote in an election about 6 months after the date of registration.
10. Minimum voters should remain at 21 years old.

Campaigning period

11. The campaigning period should not be changed.

- i) Candidates are not and should not be judged by the rakyat based on the campaigning period only. Various organisations including Bersih 2.0 sought longer campaigning period. In Bersih 2.0's case, they were seeking a minimum campaigning period of 21 days. They argued that longer period allows voters more time to gather information and deliberate on their choices.
- ii) **A campaigning period is never a period to educate the people.**
 - a) The public would have already known the candidates, the parties and how much they have served the community over the last few years.
 - b) Otherwise, why would there be a need for MPs and ADUNs to run around serving the communities between elections?
- iii) Various organisations maintained that longer period allows candidates more time to disseminate information to rural areas. Other arguments include the fact that the first general elections in 1955 had a campaign period of 42 days.
 - a) During the period in between elections, no one disseminates or is concerned about the rural areas? They only wait till the campaigning period before disseminating information to the rural areas?
 - b) During any country's first general election, it is obvious that the campaigning period is long as everything is new to the people. The parties, the candidates, even the electoral system for that matter. Understandably, longer period is required to explain all these to the public.
 - c) A long campaigning period is very taxing on all parties involved; both mentally and physically. Not forgetting, on the limited campaigning funds as well.
 - d) Changing the campaigning period will undoubtedly also apply to by-elections. Since the 2008 General Election, Malaysia saw a total of 16 by-elections over a period of 3 and half years or 42 months. Hypothetically, if the minimum campaigning period were to be changed to 28 days; Malaysia would have endured 16 months out of the 42 months campaigning. Thus to have long campaigning periods, people will be primarily preoccupied with campaigning task only.
 - e) At best, the current campaigning period can be adjusted, making it dependant on the largest constituency in terms of voters during any one election.

12. There is no need for a cooling period before the day of polling.

First past the post voting system

13. The current first past the post system should be retained.
 - i) This system is still being used by a number of developed countries such as the United Kingdom and it is a tried and tested method in Malaysia.
 - ii) People are already familiar with the system. A change in the method to determine the “winner” would add confusion for the people.

Overseas Voting

14. Our position is that overseas voting should NOT be allowed.
15. Some citizens living abroad have lost touch and contacts with the country for years. They do not have the feel of what is happening in the country. They are getting bits and pieces of news from various sources to try form a picture of what is happening in the country. What they read about Malaysia may therefore be biased and is the wrong information. It does not give them the whole truthful picture about the ongoings in the country.
16. The future of Malaysia should be determined by those who have faith and still remained in the country.

Indelible ink

17. Our position on the proposed usage of indelible ink for elections is neutral.

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