

Press Release from BERSIH 2.0
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Opposition Should Establish Shadow Cabinet to Check and Compete with Government

The Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (BERSIH 2.0) launches today a research report entitled "A Framework for a Shadow Cabinet in Malaysia" and calls on opposition parties to work together in forming a shadow cabinet at the federal and state levels to check and compete with the government of the day more effectively.

The shadow cabinet, whether at federal or state level, will provide a healthy political competition to the government with every federal minister or state exco being shadowed by an opposition member with their own alternative policy.

The research report was commissioned by BERSIH 2.0 and written by Maha Balakrishnan.

The report recommends the followings to opposition parties at federal and state levels:

1. Form a shadow cabinet with the widest possible support from the parliamentary or state assembly opposition group as the more support the shadow cabinet has, the stronger its influence to push for institutional access and privileges.
2. Shadow federal ministers or state exco should first and foremost be selected based on merit. They should have experience in the area that they have been appointed to. The lineup of any shadow cabinet should also reflect the diversity of the society it represents, in terms of political parties, factions, ethnicities, gender, age and regions.
3. A single shadow minister should be appointed to shadow each ministry of exco of the government. The shadow minister should be the lead spokesperson for the issue from the opposition.
4. The shadow cabinet should have regular meetings, at least weekly, to shadow the actual cabinet of the government. The standard items on the agenda should include:

- A report or update by the leader providing a political overview that covers a review of the activities and measures taken by the Opposition;
- Consideration of the Government's upcoming items of business in Parliament, (e.g. bills and motions) and of the Opposition's response and strategy, led by the relevant shadow minister;
- Discussion of outstanding matters of Opposition policy, led by the respective shadow minister;
- Discussion of Opposition member's upcoming items of business in Parliament, including proposed motions and questions.

BERSIH 2.0 recognises that there have been shadow cabinets established previously by Pakatan Harapan and Barisan Nasional, and by Parti Keadilan Rakyat recently under the Perikatan Nasional government.

BERSIH 2.0 further calls on the federal government and all state governments to officially recognise and institutionalise the practice of shadow cabinet as part of our democratic processes, by:

1. Conferring the standing of "Official Opposition" to the majority parliamentary group in the Opposition under the leadership of the leader of the Opposition.
2. The Standing Orders of Parliament and state assemblies be amended to give privileges and advantages to shadow ministers during procedures such as parliamentary questioning and legislative debates. It should formalise the power and authority of the leader of the Opposition and/or a representative of the shadow cabinet to be consulted on decisions relating to scheduling and timetabling of the business in the House. The revisions should also introduce more equity of opportunity between the government bench and the opposition bench.
3. In the immediate to medium term, steps should be taken to adopt and operationalise the practice that during an election, the public service must meet and advise the Official Opposition on its election policies and manifesto as part of the preparation for transition in the event that the Official Opposition wins the election. Opposition shadow ministers should be allowed to ask questions about departmental organisation and to discuss with public servants organisational changes to the public service. As in other jurisdictions, the responsibility of public servants to provide such information and input, and their protection from repercussions from the government of the day, should be encapsulated in formal codes and guidelines such as in a cabinet manual.

Released by,

The Steering Committee of BERSIH 2.0 The full report " A Framework for A Shadow Cabinet in Malaysia" can be dowloaded at link below:-

<https://www.bersih.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Bersih-Policy-Research-A-Framework-for-Shadow-Cabinet-In-Malaysia.pdf>