

Press Release (8 March 2023):

BERSIH Lauds Government's Response on Institutional Reforms to Strengthen Multiparty Democracy

The Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (BERSIH) welcomes the statements by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Law and Institutional Reforms) Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said that the government is open on equal Constituency Development Fund (CDF) and has a working plan for four other institutional reforms.

Equal CDF

In Parliament yesterday, the Prime Minister explicitly stated that he, in principle, has no objections in giving equal allocation of constituency development funds (CDF) between government MPs and opposition MPs.

BERSIH has long argued that equal CDF is necessary to strengthen multiparty democracy and to stabilise our politics by creating a level playing field with less incentives for elected representatives to be coerced or 'seduced' for defection in order to receive the allocation. CDF should be provided under a parliamentary act, and not by way of Prime Minister's discretion.

The time has come for both the Government and the Opposition to sit down to negotiate on such bill, or if necessary, for the Opposition to table a private member's bill on this. Such laws should in fact be enacted in all states . It is commendable that Perak has given equal CDF to all ADUNs since December 2020 as package deal for political stability but no legislation has been enacted yet. In the extreme case of unequal CDF, the Sarawak state government gives government lawmakers at least RM 8 million a year but not a single cent for those in the Opposition.

BERSIH and think tank IDEAS have done considerable research including on the necessary legal instrument, which both sides can draw on.

Four Other Institutional Reforms

We are heartened by a concrete expression of commitment and plan by the Law and Institutional Reforms Minister on 6 March 2023 on the four 'low-hanging fruits' reforms:

1. Political Funding bill - which we hope would include public funding for political parties based on their percentage of vote share;

2. PM's 10-year Tenure bill

3. The appointment of Parliamentary Select Committees – which we hope all ministerial portfolios would be covered, enough committees for all private MPs to participate, and some committees would be made permanent;

4. An Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCI) to study the separation of Attorney General's Chambers (AGC) and a politically-independent Public Prosecution Office – which we hope till then, prosecution would be left to the Solicitor General (SG), a professional civil servant - to avoid any suspicion of selective prosecution/impunity.

BERSIH issued a statement on 4 March calling for low-hanging fruit reforms in the next 100 days and within the first year. The Minister's reassuring response on the four institutional reforms after calls by civil society groups, experts and other stakeholders is a good sign of the Government's openness and commitment to reforms. We hope the Opposition would also respond positively to both the Government and civil society groups to forge a common agenda on institutional reforms.

Released by:

The Steering Committee of BERSIH