

Reforming Political Financing in Malaysia: Meeting with Members of Parliament

A roundtable discussion with Members of Parliament (MPs) was organised by Transparency International – Malaysia (TI-M); comprising two meetings, with Pakatan Rakyat (PR) MPs representing the opposition, and Y.B Dato' Seri Mohamed Nazri bin Abdul Aziz, de facto Law Minister in the Prime Minister's Department representing the government. The Roundtable was supported by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, with Ms Sabine Knoers, Policy Officer Economic Department attending.

The main objective of the discussion was to gather feedback, opinions, and ultimately the MPs' endorsement from for TI-M's recommendations, which is crucial as they will be responsible for implementing the reforms. TI-M hoped that the discussion would provide an effective forum for a direct dialogue with the MPs and to explain TI-M's position and expectations on the recommendations.

Meeting with Pakatan Rakyat (PR)

The panellists at this meeting were Datuk Wira Haji Wan Ahmad Wan Omar, Deputy Chairman of Election Commission of Malaysia (EC) and Professor Dr Edmund Terence Gomez from University of Malaya, with Datuk Paul Low, President of TI-M moderating. 27 participants comprising MPs and some of their assistants/secretaries attended.

At this meeting, ***Pakatan Rakyat*** MPs supported TI-M's recommendations, except for recommendation 10 which states "make it mandatory for disclosure of all sources of financing and expenditure by the political parties". They fear that full disclosure would hurt their contributors and consequently their financing. For mandatory full disclosure, alternative financing for political parties is crucial. They agreed that direct state funding would be the best solution as it enhances transparency and accountability. The MPs supported implementing the reforms in phases as some reforms should take precedence. Some MPs preferred media reforms being given first priority, especially banning media ownership by political parties, and equal access to media.

Meeting with Barisan Nasional (BN)

TI-M had tried to organise a meeting with the ***Barisan Nasional*** MPs to discuss the proposed reforms. However, the BN Backbenchers Club (BNBBC) turned down our offer to have a dialogue on the topic. Subsequently, TI-M approached Dato' Seri Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz, the *de facto* Law Minister in the Prime Minister's Office. Dato' Seri Mohamed Nazri showed great interest in having a dialogue with TI-M and the meeting was held at Parliament House following the meeting with the PR MPs.

At the meeting, Dato' Seri Mohamed Nazri and his Deputy Datuk Liew Vui Keong explained that the BNBBC did not pursue a dialogue with TI-M as they do not agree with the proposal of institutional reforms, especially those concerning the Election Commission (EC). However, the government is interested in TI-M's recommendations on direct state funding, banning of media ownership by political parties and disclosure of political donations. An in-depth study is required on details and guidelines of state funding. He agreed that political parties should not own mainstream media and that public media organisations should provide equal and fair coverage for both the ruling coalition and the opposition, especially during general elections. This is subject to the opposition formalising their present coalition into an official political party, so that the coverage will be equally distributed between the government and opposition.

Dato' Seri also supports having a list of permissible and non-permissible donors before implementing full disclosure of political donations as the government wants clear

guidelines and regulations on political donations to avoid abuses by individuals with vested interests and conflicts of interests.