

Procedure for recount of votes,
colour of slips among weaknesses

Polls laws need to be amended, says PM

**By Sharif Haron and
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JOHOR BARU, Tues. — Several sections of the election laws need to be amended to overcome their weaknesses, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said the procedure for recount of votes, which presently only allowed candidates to lodge a complaint or ask for a recount after the results were announced, was one such weakness.

The law stipulates that once the election results are announced and the documents sealed, scrutiny and recount of votes can only be done on the order of a High Court judge following a petition.

Citing another example, Dr Mahathir said the colour of the voting slips and the colour on the ballot boxes did not tally and this had confused voters.

"These are among other aspects of the election laws that need to be improved," he told a Press conference at the end of his two-day visit to Johor today.

In the April general election, Dr Mahathir was among several candidates who had expressed their dissatisfaction over the mix-up of colours of the ballot papers and the colours of the labels pasted on the ballot boxes for the parliamentary and State seats.

Voters were confused when they found the labels on the ballot box for the State seat bore the same colour as the ballot paper for the parliamentary election. Both were yellow.

Dr Mahathir had expressed the fear that there could be many spilt votes because of the confusing colour code.

On whether there were plans to extend the 60-day by-election period, Dr Mahathir said there were none as the Government felt the time frame was sufficient for political parties to prepare for a by-election.

"We feel 60-day period is sufficient for parties to prepare for by-elections and we don't see the need to extend it."

Asked if the Government would set up a body or assign a ministry to oversee the activities of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the Prime Minister said most NGOs were capable of looking after themselves.

"When an interested group of people set up clubs or organisations, they should be able to finance themselves and their activities."

"One cannot expect to set up a company and ask the Government to subsidise it," he said.

Dr Mahathir was also asked to comment on the recent statement by a Japa-

nese official, who said the EAEC should only take off with the blessing of all countries of the larger Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (Apec).

Dr Mahathir said it was yet another excuse by Japan for not agreeing to the EAEC because it was still under the influence of the United States.

"Actually they (Japan) are not free ... and it is the US that does not allow Japan to take part in the EAEC," he said.

Japan's Foreign Ministry spokesman Takeshi Nakane had said at the Asean Ministerial Meeting/Asean Regional Forum/Post-Ministerial Meetings in Bandar Sri Begawan last week that Japan firmly agreed that the EAEC should be launched with the blessing of all Apec member countries and that any attempt to divide Apec should be avoided.

Nakane also said Japan would continue to seek the inclusion of Australia and New Zealand.

Dr Mahathir said Asean, including its seventh and newest member Vietnam, recently reaffirmed to an early realisation of the EAEC.

This commitment was contained in a joint communique at the end of the 28th Asean Ministerial Meeting.

"We don't really understand the Japanese Government. Earlier they said as long as Asean members agree, they will too. Now they bring in Apec."

Dr Mahathir said Japan's latest position might delay the taking off of EAEC, but Asean countries would pursue the matter nevertheless.

On the Bosnian Prime Minister Haris Silajdzic's resignation, Dr Mahathir

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Dr M reaffirms support for Bosnia

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said he had yet to receive any information or details.

He said his resignation needed to be resolved quickly to enable the Bosnian Government to focus on fighting the Serbs.

Dr Mahathir also reaffirmed Malaysia's support for Bosnia regardless of who led the Bosnian Government.

"We hope that they can solve whatever problems they are currently facing and Malaysia hopes that Bosnia will keep Silajdzic as their Prime Minister.

"However, we support whoever represents the Government of Bosnia," he said.