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For the purity of the ballot

ELECTIONS are both a supreme political act and a complicated administrative exercise. The compendium of post-electoral allegations will always be there. Many prove to be unsubstantiated but this does not mean that all of them are the ravings of sour losers who cannot take a fair beating.

The fact remains that both the system and conduct of elections must be free from defects that could distort and undermine the process by which the voters exercise their sovereign power. The finding by the High Court that there were phantom voters in the Likas constituency confirms the imperfections within the system.

Another flaw in the system is the case of voters who could not vote because their names did not appear in the electoral roll or were transferred. This, in effect, serves to deny them of their right to choose their own representative. It would appear that in the constituencies where this occurred, the consent of those who are governed has not been fully or legitimately secured.

According to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, many components in the voter registration process and the management of the electoral roll are not proper. As he pointed out, a review is necessary to ensure fair and genuine elections in the future.

True, no system is perfect. In the 1996 American elections, for instance, the political parties challenged each other for perpetrating voter fraud by misuse of absentee ballots in Louisiana and voting by non-citizens in California. Nor were its elections in 2000 free from allegations of improprieties.

Nevertheless, we owe it to ourselves to ensure the integrity of our electoral process and strengthen the voter registration system. The rights of the voters to vote in a certain place should be considered. They should not be treated as shuttlecocks, to be placed at random without their knowledge. Any new voters register must be exhibited for public scrutiny for a certain period. It must be distributed widely enough to provide voters with the opportunity to review and correct it. Copies of the final register should be given to all the political parties in both paper and computer-readable form.

We are disturbed by the seeming failure of Electoral Commission to respond adequately to the thousands of complaints in the Likas constituency. We hope this is a mere aberration. Any reasons for the absence or lack of appropriate actions must be explained to the public. For the sake of its credibility, the Commission must be seen to act, and expeditiously so, on complaints without fear or favour.

The intimidation and various tactics used in the Lunas by-election shows the need to review the list of electoral offences. We would also urge the use of transparent ballot boxes to forestall allegations of stuffing ballot boxes before voting and ballot dumping.

It is worthwhile to establish an inter-party advisory committee which will bring together all the political representatives and the Commission to discuss ways and means to improve the system. Of course, the Commission would have the final word.

Clearly, a review is necessary to ensure greater transparency in all aspects of the electoral process. It would create popular faith in the ballot box as the arbiter of a democratic electoral contest and eliminate

or, at the very least, minimise disputes over electoral outcomes.  
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