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Support for move to give EC greater enforcement powers

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Political parties from the Barisan Nasional and Opposition today supported the Election Commission's proposal for greater enforcement powers to ensure smooth and incident-free campaigning during elections.

BN parties, in expressing their support, hit out at the Opposition for their excessive and sometime vicious campaign in Pendang and Anak Bukit.

Except for Pas vice-president Datuk Mustafa Ali who said that Pas was against the proposal, other Opposition leaders were cautious in expressing their support.

Yesterday, EC chairman Datuk Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahman said the commission, in proposing greater enforcement powers, wanted the right to register all political parties to ensure campaigns were conducted in strict accordance with the law.

He said the EC was now merely referees with no enforcement power.

Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhammad Taib said the move was timely as something needed to be done soon to ensure no major incidents occurred in coming elections.

He said the Opposition was known to violate election regulations such as ending campaigns at midnight on the eve of polling. This happened not only in Pendang and Anak Bukit but also in the Sanggang, Lunas, Indera Kayangan and Ketari by-elections.

MCA deputy president Datuk Lim Ah Lek said some of the things said and done by Opposition campaigners during the recent by-elections were unbecoming and totally unacceptable.

"Though we may have our differences, I do not think anyone should stoop so low as to launch personal attacks against the Barisan Nasional leaders."

The EC's recommendation for the formation of an Election Monitoring Unit was a good move in ensuring smooth and incident-free campaigning during elections.

He said the unit, comprising police, EC officials, candidates and party representatives, would help solve problems on the spot and ensure that all complaints were handled effectively.

MIC vice-president Datuk S. Veerasingham said the attacks by the Opposition, especially against Puteri Umno chief Azalina Othman were uncalled for and unacceptable. "This is not campaigning. Hurling personal attacks and distributing defamatory posters, including one of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad dressed as a Catholic priest are ridiculous," he said.

Gerakan secretary-general Chia Kwang Chye said the political culture of the Opposition lately had worsened and it was time the EC was better equipped to handle all untoward incidents.

He said the EC should also look into ways of working more closely with the police to ensure all present and new laws governing the conduct of elections were better enforced.

PPP president Datuk M. Kayveas such a move would ensure the democratic process was better adhered to and rid campaigning of personal attacks.

He said while the BN tried hard to ensure no personal attacks were launched at campaigns, it was becoming a norm for the Opposition to sensationalise their rival's personal issues and use it as a tactic to fish for votes.

DAP secretary-general Kerk Kim Hock said while there was a need for stricter enforcement, the EC should first invite all political parties to give their feedback on how campaigning for an election should be done.

He said it would be pointless for the EC to be given extra powers when it did not know the root cause of campaigning problems and the best way to overcome it.

In Marang, acting Pas president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang said Pas was confident that the EC would act impartially when introducing a new set of rules.

Abdul Hadi who is also Terengganu Menteri Besar said the EC had the ability to act fairly in discharging its duties as long as there was no interference from the Government.

In Kuala Terengganu, Pas vice-president Datuk Mustafa Ali said Pas was against the EC's new proposals, saying that the role of the commission should remain as a body to ensure a fair and just election.

"EC cannot become another enforcement arm and the existing election laws are also adequate."