

21/05/2003

NGOs must amend constitution to participate in elections, says EC chairman

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Non-governmental organisations wishing to take part in elections must amend their constitutions to include provisions to allow them to do so.

Election Commission chairman Datuk Wira Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahman said NGOs would have to amend their constitutions to act as political organisations, approved by the Registrar of Societies.

He said unlike political parties which were registered as political bodies, certain NGOs were involved in politics because their constitutions allowed them to do so.

"It's simple. If they have that element in their constitution, they are free to contest," he said at a Press conference after receiving a delegation from Cambodia, which included its Deputy Prime Minister Sar Kheng.

"The EC has no power to deny or approve their intention to contest. If their constitutions say so, then they are welcome to contest.

"The amendment to their constitutions will be subject to the Registrar's approval."

Rashid said it was not the EC's intention to "invite" NGOs to contest in elections, but that they could do so if their constitutions allowed it.

"If they want to take part, all they have to do is have that element in their constitutions and register their logos with us."

He added that the EC would hold a dialogue with Barisan Nasional parties tomorrow and Opposition parties the next day to get feedback.

Last Friday Rashid was reported as saying that NGOs registered under the Societies Act could contest in general elections provided they register with the EC.

The following day, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was quoted as saying that NGOs had to register as political parties if they wanted to contest.

Last Sunday, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim said he would propose to the Cabinet that the definition of political parties under the Registration Act 1996 be defined clearly and objectively.

Other suggestions to be discussed at these meetings would be whether or not political parties are required to register with the EC to enable their conduct to be monitored during elections.

Rashid said the EC would also get feedback from the political parties on proposals for a pledge or undertaking for candidates and parties, and the creation of enforcement units during an election.

He said when these proposals became law, it would give the EC the power to monitor and regulate the behaviour of political parties and candidates.

On another matter, Rashid said the DAP should not just criticise the EC without showing proof to support such allegations.

It was the only party which declined to meet the EC to discuss its problems, he added.

In today's meeting with Sar Kheng, Rashid said Cambodia wanted to learn from Malaysia's electoral system which was based on a simple majority and had ensured continued political stability for the country.

Cambodia, Rashid said, used a system based on proportional majority.

"They are very appreciative of our system.