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Parties welcome EC proposal to overcome phantom voters' problem

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Political parties, including the Opposition, today welcomed the Election Commission's proposal for more powers to overcome the problem of phantom voters and allegations of fraud.

Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib, saying that allegations of phantom voters had been plaguing every election, supports any proposal which would help put an end to this.

He suggested that the EC be given wider powers to act on the spot against offenders and not have to wait for police intervention.

MCA vice-president Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn said the proposal was in accordance with the principles of democracy that an elected representative should be voted in by people in the constituency.

"It is unfair for people who do not live in a particular constituency to elect the wakil rakyat there. MCA fully supports the proposal," added Fong, who is also Human Resources Minister.

MIC vice-president Datuk S. Veerasingam said it was a good move to place voters in constituencies according to the addresses on their identity cards as it would make it much easier for the authorities to identify and weed out phantom voters.

"The EC and the National Registration Department must work closely if this proposal is to be a success," he said.

Gerakan secretary-general Chia Kwang Chye said the proposal was a logical and systematic way of resolving the problem of phantom voters.

"They must also work to ensure the names of voters who have died are quickly removed from the electoral roll and keep it (roll) clean and updated at all times," he said.

EC chairman Datuk Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahman said last Saturday the commission was seeking powers to transfer voters from one constituency to another based on addresses in their identity cards to overcome the problem of phantom voters and allegations of fraud.

Yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government agreed with the proposal.

Dr Mahathir said the Government welcomed the proposal, which would empower the EC to transfer voters from one constituency to another based on the addresses in the identity cards, if it could help overcome the problem of phantom voters.

DAP secretary-general Kerk Kim Hock said the party was prepared to support any proposal to ensure that the problem of phantom voters was eradicated and the electoral roll kept clean.

"However, we strongly feel the EC should call for an all-party meeting to further discuss ways of ensuring clean and fair elections," he said.

Pas information chief Azizan Abdul Razak echoed similar views that an all-party meeting was necessary to iron out any irregularities the political parties faced.

"We are all for a clean electoral roll, but the EC must be sincere and be willing to listen to feedback from political parties," he said.

Parti Keadilan Nasional deputy president Abdul Rahman Othman, however, did not think giving more powers to the EC would solve the problem of phantom voters.

"People move from one place to another and many do not change their address in the identity cards. So, there is not much the EC can do unless those who changed their addresses make changes to their ICs."

Abdul Rahman said the EC's present system was generally good and almost "cheat-proof".

"We also heard many complaints about vote rigging and stories about empty ballot boxes being found but there is no truth to such claims."

Meanwhile, an EC official said it was not likely that the proposal would be tabled at Wednesday's Cabinet meeting.

"We are still finalising the papers which will be tabled through Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Tan Sri Bernard Dompok," he added.