

EC chief 'misleading the public'
Malaysiakini.com
March 13, 2007

An election watchdog today accused the Election Commission chief Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahman of misleading the public on the issue of electoral irregularities in a recent interview.

The Coalition for Clean and fair Elections (Bersih) said Abdul Rashid, in his interview with the New Sunday Times, gave the impression that the EC has done its best to combat election irregularities.

"At the same time, [he was] shifting the blame to the NRD (National Registration Department), the government and civil society. Abdul Rashid has failed in his role as the guardian of our electoral process," said Bersih in a statement.

The watchdog said that the EC supremo had also wrongly suggested that civil society has made no attempts to hold dialogues with the government to seek electoral changes.

"The fact of the matter is that the issue of electoral corruption has been raised in various fora, including Parliament itself.

"Bersih has also sought to meet Abdul Rashid but has been unsuccessful in getting an appointment in the last three months," added Bersih.

Bersih was launched last November with the objective of campaigning for clean and fair elections in Malaysia. It comprises of five opposition political parties and is endorsed by 26 NGOs.

'Don't blame me'

On Sunday, Abdul Rashid warned his detractors to back off, asking them to get their facts right before criticising him.

He was upset that some pressure groups, researchers and political parties did not understand that the EC's hands were tied in some matters.

Abdul Rashid said that the EC was only an implementing agency in elections, adding that the critics should try talking to the government if they want changes.

He also said that the issue of phantom voters could be put to rest if the National Registration Act was strictly enforced to prevent people from returning to vote in their original constituencies.

The law states that voters with a change of address must inform the National Registration Department within 90 days to allow them to be registered to vote in their new area.

However this is seldom done, resulting in people going back to vote in constituencies where they had originally registered. This has led to repeated claims of phantom

voters by political parties, claimed the EC chief.

Samples of irregularities

Bersih today disputed this, saying that Abdul Rashid was not being totally candid in the interview.

"In fact, he was the one trying to mislead the public by simplifying, omitting as well as denying the facts," said Bersih.

The watchdog said that the problem of phantom voters should not be solely attributed to the failure of voters to update their voting details when they move or change their addresses.

Relying on some examples from the 2004 general elections, Bersih dismissed Abdul Rashid's claims as baseless.

Bersih said that a survey done by another election watchdog Mafrel before the 2004 general election found that 232 of 965 voters (24 percent) sampled in Gombak and 282 of 796 voters sampled in Lembah Pantai (35 percent) were not recognised by community leaders and local residents.

"Most ironically, five Chinese and one Malay phantom voters were found to be 'living' in the house of Keadilan vice-president Azmin Ali's mother in 2004," it said.

The same survey also disclosed that voters had successfully registered to vote using non-residential addresses and even false or unknown addresses.

There were at least 116 such fraudulent addresses in Lembah Pantai and 13 in Gombak in 2004.

In other cases, some were registered at addresses without house numbers, even though they lived in proper flats or apartments.

"For example, in the Lembah Pantai electoral roll dated March 2, 2004, a total of 203, 231 and 273 voters respectively were registered at Blocks 1, 2 and 3 of Rumah Pangsa Sri Pahang in Bukit Bangsar, without any unit numbers."

Bersih said that Abdul Rashid owed the public a full explanation on these instances of irregularities.

Resign now!

Bersih also wanted to know how the EC head obtained the figure of close to four million of the 10 million registered voters have moved away from their constituencies, as he mentioned in the interview.

"The public has a right to know how he obtained this figure. His methodology must not be untraceable, just like the phantom voters," added Bersih with a tinge of sarcasm.

The election watchdog also added that the EC had inherent powers under the 2002 Elections (Registration of Electors) Regulations Act to make house-to-house inquiries to verify the identity of voters.

“Is it therefore not misleading of Abdul Rashid to say that purging non-residing voters requires the enforcement of the National Registration Act, and therefore beyond the EC's power?”

Bersih also lamented that Abdul Rashid had ignored the question of campaign finances, caretaker government and administrative neutrality in his interview.

“He owes the public a thorough explanation and apology. The only honourable thing for him to do now is to tender his resignation,” it added.

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