

Mafrel: Heavy police presence unnecessary
Malaysiakini.com
March 24, 2007

An election watchdog found that the heavy police presence, complete with riot gear, during nominations and polling day of the Batu Talam by-election too overwhelming.

Malaysians for Free and Fair Elections (Mafrel) chairperson Abd Malek Hussin observed a heavy cordon of riot police and plain clothed special branch (SB) personnel with video recording devices at the public display location of nomination papers.

"Such a scenario did not provide a conducive and civil atmosphere for electors of the constituency to enter the public display location in order to examine or make objection to the nomination papers," said Abd Malek in a statement yesterday.

Mafrel, which managed to observe six out of 12 polling centres during the Jan 28 by-election, also noticed SB personnel were making video recordings of voters entering and leaving the polling centres.

One SB personnel was even spotted with a 'reporter' tag while several others were observed performing video recordings inside the polling centres, said Abd Malek.

"The Election Commission (EC) must strictly ensure that only minimal and necessary police presence be allowed to maintain peace and order inside polling centres and prohibit altogether visual recording by SB's inside the centres," he said.

Insufficient polling agents

In view of several technical glitches with computerised electoral roll checking system observed during polling day, Abd Malek recommended that a complete printed set of electoral roll be made available at all polling centres.

"The EC should also consider inviting and allowing public observers, especially civil society groups, to serve as polling agents and counting agents with a view to broaden public consciousness on democratic practices of this country and enhance efforts to conduct free and fair elections," said the veteran poll observer.

According to Abd Malek, there weren't any polling agents appointed by the independent candidate at the polling centres observed.

During the Batu Talam by-election, Barisan Nasional candidate Abdul Aziz Kiram scored a 5,857 victory against independent candidate Ng Chee Pang, who garnered 419 votes.

In another development, Mafrel yesterday announced that it will be monitoring the upcoming Machap by-election, mainly on nomination day (April 3) and polling day (April 12).

Abd Malek said Mafrel would seek official accreditation from the EC.

The by-election was called following incumbent Poh Ah Tiam's death on March 15.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.

Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/64989>