

RM100 mil vote-buying: Why is EC silent?

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The Election Commission - the body tasked to organise free and fair polls in Malaysia - has been slammed for keeping mum on what has been described as the "worst case of money politics in the 50-year history of by-elections".

According to Opposition Leader Lim Kit Siang, the amount of money the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition is pouring into this Saturday's Ijok by-election could "easily touch RM100 million".

This amounts to 1,000 times more than what a candidate could spend in the contest for a state seat which under the election law is RM100,000, lamented Lim.

Even before nomination, Selangor Menteri Besar Mohd Khir Toyo has announced RM36 million for various development projects for the hotly contested constituency.

"With the Deputy Prime Minister Najib Razak acting as the Santa Claus announcing 'freebies' all over the constituency everyday, the total development funds poured into Ijok may double if not treble Khir Toyo's initial announcement," said Lim.

He took Election Commission chairman Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahman to task for "keeping totally silent with regard to such flagrant disregard of the election law".

"Ask any person, or even a student will know, that this is money politics to buy votes except Abdul Rashid.

"Is the Election Commission prepared to establish its independence, professionalism and commitment to its constitutional mandate to conduct free, fair and clean elections by speaking out against the worst case of money politics in 50 years in the history of by-elections in Ijok?"

Not vote-buying

Abdul Rashid recently commented that his commission is not empowered to probe allegations of vote-buying. Instead, it is the task of the Anti-Corruption Agency.

He also said that those unhappy with alleged vote-buying - especially the government's promises of development funds - could take this to court.

However, he was quick to add that previous court decisions have indicated that such promises of 'development goodies' are not considered as vote-buying.

Alor Gajah district officer Hashim Ismail, who was the returning officer of the Machap by-election held early this month, had yesterday revealed that RM30 million of development projects were poured into the constituency during the nine-day campaign period.

"With 9,623 voters in Machap, this worked out to RM3,000 of development benefits for each voter," said Lim.

"However, this RM30 million channeling of development funds is not the sole item of expenditures for the BN candidate, as there were also expenses incurred by the candidate and the astronomical sums incurred by BN and its component parties."

In the Machap by-election, the candidate from DAP - a party led by Lim - lost to BN's MCA.

'Toothless tiger' on a PR stunt

Abdul Rashid was also lambasted for his proposal to form a liaison committee - comprising all contesting political parties - to ensure fairer elections.

"While DAP ... is of the view that the latest proposal seems more like a public relation stunt in order to shift the EC's responsibility as the guardian of clean and fair elections to the so-called liaison committee," said the party's election strategy advisor Liew Chin Tong.

"So long as the EC remains a toothless tiger with no power nor the will to execute laws governing elections, including the Election Offences Act 1954 which stipulates punishment for vote-buying and other offences, the liaison committee will be a futile effort and merely a 'window-dressing' exercise."

The EC chief had yesterday, in an interview with Mingguan Malaysia, challenged the perception that his commission is not fair, independent and transparent in the discharge of its constitutional mandate to conduct elections.

Lim accused Abdul Rashid for "defending the indefensible as the EC's record is a history of unmitigated and abysmal failure to conduct free, fair, transparent and clean elections".

He listed the following EC's failures:

- * Opposition parties not allowed to send polling agents to supervise the casting of postal ballots by members of the police and security forces to ensure free and fair casting of votes.

- * Unfair, dishonest and one-sided media coverage, whether print, radio or television during the election campaigns, such as 'below-the-belt' and unethical cartoons, write-ups, broadcasts and telecasts and the 'fear and scare' advertisements against the opposition.

- * Fail to prohibit abuse of government resources and funds during election campaigns.

- * The abuses by the 'caretaker' government in allocating funds and giving election promises with regard to development projects, or abuses of power by ministers of the 'caretaker' government in misappropriating public funds for party election campaigning, such as traveling and other misuse of public resources.

Ijok by-election bonanza

Date	Allocations	Value
April 15	Construction of Ubudiah mosque at Taman Purnama	RM5 million
April 18	Public facilities (roads, street lighting, drainage etc)	RM36 million
April 20	Refurbishment of Al-Awwabin mosque	RM800,000
April 21	Land titles for more than 400 lots	Unknown
	Upgrading SMK Raja Muda Musa	Unknown
	New hall for SRJK (C) Yuk Chih	RM800,000
April 22	Kpg Bukit Badong mosque upgrading	RM300,000
	Rehabilitating landfill	RM2.3 million
April 23	Grants and approval letters to seven mosques, 16 suraus and six religious schools	RM3.5 million
	To build an Islamic center in Taman Pancaran	RM200,000

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