

**Fix MyKad problem before going biometric**  
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COMMENT Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak in supporting the biometric system the Election Commission plans to introduce is reported as saying: "The government has agreed to provide allocations for the Election Commission (EC) to implement the biometric voter verification system."

Najib said the system was one of the initiatives undertaken by the EC to ensure transparency in the country's elections.

"The implementation of the biometric system will be able to counter allegations about the existence of phantom voters," he said at a meet-the-people session at Dewan 2020 in Kangar.

One cannot help but to wonder why the prime minister is so adamant in rejecting the "indelible ink" proposal and rush for the biometric system.

**Let's talk about the cost**

It is an undeniable fact that the indelible ink system is much cheaper. In 2008, the cost of using this ink was RM2.4 million for the entire voting population of Malaysia, as stated by the EC itself.

Considering that election day is just one day, within a window of just nine hours, the biometric system implemented must be 100 percent reliable on that day and within that period.

This entails:

- \* Every single biometric machine being 100 percent operational at every polling station. Bear in mind that there are an estimated 10,000 polling stations nationwide. The Kuala Selangor parliamentary constituency alone has 48 voting stations;

- \* Installing, testing and commissioning the system at every polling station throughout Malaysia before election day;

- \* Training all the personnel involved in the system to handle the system well, long before election day;

- \* Ensuring uninterrupted power supply at every polling station. This will mean every polling station must have a power supply back-up;

- \* Providing easily reachable technical support for the biometric system, within 10 minutes of every voting station;

- \* Ensuring continuous communication between each polling station and the central database centre. For polling stations in remote areas, new communication infrastructure must first be installed; and

- \* Guaranteeing that the reliability of the database prepared by the National Registration Department and the EC, since this is totally dependent on the efficiency of their respective personnel.

Increasing the reliability of the voting system by this magnitude will easily increase the cost of the entire electoral system, 10-fold at least. I won't be surprised if the cost of biometrics for each polling constituency in Malaysia touches the RM1 billion mark.

This amount, for a nine-hour period for one day every five years, is simply too much considering that the indelible ink option is much cheaper and much simpler to administer and implement.

I am sure every that level-headed Malaysians will opt for the indelible ink method. It's just sensible to do

so.

### **The issue of MyKad**

Further, every registered voter must have in his or her possession a valid and functioning "MyKad" if the biometric system is to work.

mykad card 271205 blurred Unfortunately, the problem of faulty MyKad is a problem of gigantic proportions in Malaysia.

In 2008, the then home minister, Syed Hamid Albar, admitted that 10 percent of the MyKad issued had to be replaced because they were "faulty".

As The Star reported: KUALA LUMPUR: About 10% of the 24 million MyKad identification cards issued since 2001 had been replaced after they were found to be faulty. Home Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said most of the cases were recorded this year, with 888,495 replacement MyKad identification cards issued until October.

So serious is the problem with the quality of the MyKad in Malaysia that the Home Ministry secretary-general proposed a total replacement of all the MyKad, as Berita Harian reported:

Ketua Setiausaha Kementerian Dalam Negeri (KDN), Datuk Seri Mahmood Adam memberitahu Berita Harian, cadangan menggantikan MyKad pernah dikemukakan dalam Rancangan Malaysia Kesembilan (RMK-9), namun ditangguhkan berikutan kekangan ekonomi.

"Kabinet memutuskan penukaran (MyKad) tidak dibuat ketika itu kerana belanjanya besar dan banyak projek lain yang perlu diberikan keutamaan. Ia seterusnya diserapkan dalam Rancangan Malaysia Ke-10 (RMK-10) dan diteliti sekali lagi.

(Home Ministry Secretary-General Datuk Seri Mahmood Adam told Berita Harian the proposal to replace MyKad has been submitted under the 9th Malaysia Plan, but it was postponed due to the economic crisis.

("The Cabinet decided the replacement of the MyKad cannot be made then because the cost is too big and there are other projects with more priority. It will be incorporated in the 10th Malaysian Plan and will be studied again.")

So, the big question is, how can biometric voting be implemented when the MyKad problem remains unresolved?

Even my own MyKad is faulty. I still have not made any effort to replace my MyKad because I am not sure whether the replacement will be in working order.

We do not know how many million MyKad out there are faulty. Nobody knows the exact figure.

What will happen when a person is prevented from voting because he or she has a faulty MyKad? Wouldn't that be an infringement of one's right under the constitution?

In truth, before the EC can even consider using the biometric system, it has to ensure that the MyKad problem is fully resolved.

The sudden rush to support the implementation of biometric system is highly suspect.

Especially when Najib has admitted that the MyKad problem is still lingering and it will take the 10th Malaysian Plan budget to resolve the problem.

The fact that Umno prefers the biometric system instead of the indelible ink method is also a big question.

Why would Umno opt for a system that is more expensive and complicated system over the indelible ink system that works just as well, if not better, and is very much cheaper and much more simpler?

Consider also the fact that the biometric system relies on the state's database system that is 100 percent under the thumb of Umno-controlled institutions.

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