

Ongkili: No constitutional hurdles to indelible ink
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There are no hurdles to implementing the use of indelible ink on voters - just an amendment to the election regulations will suffice, says the parliamentary select committee (PSC) on electoral reform.

PSC chairperson Maximus Ongkili said attorney-general Abdul Gani Patail has clarified his earlier stand that a constitutional amendment was necessary.

“He explained that it can be done either way, through an amendment to the regulations or the constitution,” Ongkili told reporters after chairing a two-hour-long closed-door hearing in Parliament House today.

He also cleared the air on the AG’s much-criticised stand prior to this, that Article 119 of the federal constitution had to be amended if the use of indelible ink was to be implemented.

When Gani (right) wrote to the PSC and the Election Commission (EC) two weeks ago, Ongkili said, the letter was vague on details.

However, at its fifth hearing today, Gani presented his views on the introduction of indelible ink and the committee thrashed out all the confusion on the matter.

“We are satisfied with his explanation... (but) we will wait for it in black-and-white from the AG.

“We have requested that he submits another letter by Monday and then we’ll make our decision,” said Ongkili, who is also science, technology and innovation minister.

Approached by reporters at the door as he left, Gani refused to respond to questions and would only say that “the meeting was good”.

'Necessary to curb fraud'

Election reform proponents have maintained that the implementation of indelible ink was necessary to curb voting fraud and have stressed that the procedure could be implemented without any constitutional amendment if its use was included in the election regulations.

As the election regulations are not part of the constitution, an amendment would simply require the Yang di-Pertuan Agong’s approval and then given to MPs for their perusal.

The EC mooted the indelible ink plan for the March 8, 2008, general election, but scrapped the measure at the eleventh hour, citing following legal advice and security threat.

Also discussed today was the procedure for automatic registration of voters, but Ongkili said the AG was of the opinion that this measure would require constitutional changes.

The call to automatically register a voter reaching the age of 21 is among the eight demands of leading electoral reform group, Coalition for Fair and Clean Elections (Bersih).

The PSC, which is in the midst of holding its public hearings, is scheduled to hold its next hearing on Nov 25 and 26 at Kompleks Pentadbiran Kerajaan Persekutuan, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.

It completed its two-day public hearing in Kuala Lumpur on Nov 11 and 12.

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