

**Bersih 3.0 rally: Last push for democracy**  
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COMMENT Parliament has dealt a devastating blow to the electoral reform movement, heightening pre-election tension by several notches.

Amendments to an election law in a jammed parliamentary session that ended at the ungodly hour of 3am on April 20 have practically stripped Pakatan Rakyat of its last defence against anticipated rampant fraud on polling day.

Chief among the regressive and obnoxious amendments to the Election Offences Act 1954 is the removal - by deleting Section 26A(1) and (2) - of the right of candidates and their representatives to be present to observe the registration of voters at polling stations.

azlanWithout the chance to observe the process, how can a candidate spot a phantom voter?

In an electoral roll notorious for its infestation of phantoms, isn't this stealthy move by the ruling BN tantamount to opening the floodgate for fraud on a scale hitherto unimaginable?

And hasn't this move also negated the impending introduction of indelible ink which is the only reform adapted by the Election Commission (EC) and the only fruit of the six months of labour by the parliamentary select committee (PSC) on electoral reform?

What is the reason for this amendment? The government said the presence of a candidate's staff will "cause difficulties" to election officers. Asked for such reports in past elections, it could give none.

Isn't this sneaky move a brazen attempt to commit daylight robbery? Isn't this the clearest evidence that BN's self-esteem has descended so low that it has to resort to such shameful and dastardly act?

Another amendment that is in consonance with BN's unabashed attempt to 'steal' the coming election is the removal - by deleting Section 11(1)(c) - of the requirement to have all printed materials to carry the name of printer and publisher.

In a country which has seen gutter politics plunging to its lowest level - with BN cybertroopers and pornographic propagandists virtually enjoying impunity in spreading lies to vilify opposition leaders almost incessantly - such virtual exemption for printers and publishers to take responsibility is a blanket licence for vilifiers to do what they like.

Yes, this applies to both protagonists, but BN has the upper hand in that it enjoys virtual impunity while its opponent does not.

NONEThere is further evidence that Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's initiative to institute electoral reform through the setting up of the PSC is an election gimmick with no intention to reform.

For example, there was no mention of other PSC recommendations such as fair media coverage, which is non-existent, and advance voting in lieu of the totally discredited postal voting.

These are two key reform platforms demanded by Bersih, whose eight demands represent the consensus of all decent minded Malaysians who yearn for the restoration of some measure of democracy, starting with clean and fair elections.

Regressive amendments

Instead of meeting these demands, BN has regressed by reducing transparency and encouraging dirty campaigning through the amendments.

BN should realise that at the core of our electoral plaque is an EC which now enjoys practically zero public confidence and public trust through its increasingly open and daring political partisanship tilted towards BN.

NONE It doesn't help the EC's credibility when its head Abdul Aziz Yusof (left) makes the ridiculous boast that he has the cleanest electoral roll in the world in spite of numerous reports of irregularities - and then refuses to revamp it.

Ong Kian Ming, the director of Malaysian Electoral Roll Analysis Project, an independent research group, revealed at a press conference on April 23, that in addition to the few hundred thousands of dubious voters registered with various irregularities, there are 3.1 million potential non-resident voters.

This is in breach of Article 119 (1)(b) of the federal constitution which stipulates that only resident voters are qualified to vote.

This 3.1 million figure was arrived at by the National Registration Department (NRD) which carried out an exercise called Projek SPR in 2002 to identify cases of voters in Peninsular Malaysia whose MyKad address differs from the voting constituency.

Ong's random survey of these 'non-resident voters' indicate that many continue to remain 'non-resident', as the EC seems to have made no effort to rectify this huge problem. It was carried over from 2002 when the EC instituted a new system to stop voters from casting their ballot in constituencies that do not tally with their MyKad address.

Given all this, what chance is there to prevent the most unfair election in our history?

It is for this reason that the Bersih 3.0 rally will prove to be crucial in the nation's struggle to regain its lost democratic heritage and determine the fate of the nation for generations to come.



