

EC amendments alone enough to justify Bersih 3.0

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COMMENT I note from the Malaysiakini report 'I voted for removal of polling agents, says Khairy', that after our debate on Wednesday, Rembau MP Khairy Jamaluddin made further statements to the press regarding the Election Offences (Amendment) Bill 2012 which was passed by Parliament on April 19.

I would like to comment on some of the issues he raised to the press that he had not addressed during the debate.

NONE We must be very clear about the far reaching effects of these amendments that stop agents of candidates from being in the election booth.

The amendment removes entirely the only effective check on phantom and illegal voters.

The candidate's agents can detect anything suspicious relating to the voters as they go through the booth in the polling stations. Their ICs can be scrutinised here and they will have visual confirmation of the voter.

The right of a candidate to have his or her agents within the polling stations is therefore vital to ensure oversight of the electoral process.

The unholy haste with which the amendments were rushed through Parliament on the last day of its sitting without proper consultation raises many questions.

When asked about the purported trouble being created by the election agents, which was the basis of the amendment, no evidence of it was provided in Parliament.

The response that polling agents could still set up booths 50 metres away from the polling stations is no answer at all. Fifty metres is over 160 feet! It is impossible for agents to "monitor suspicious voters" from that distance.

This will now also reduce the effect of indelible ink as no one can see from that distance if the finger of a person who has voted is marked.

Although polling agents inside the polling stations are still allowed, they are placed too far from the voters to detect anything suspicious.

Why EC did not inform PSC on changes?

Another question that remains unanswered is why did the Election Commission not disclose its proposal to amend section 26A of the Election Offences Act to the Parliamentary Select Committee?

NONE If it had such a problem with the agents, this was the best place to raise it.

Against the backdrop of the persistent and unexplained problems with the electoral roll, this utter lack of openness by the Election Commission, combined with the speed with which the amendments were passed through Parliament, only increases suspicions about electoral fraud and the public's loss of confidence in the independence and integrity of the commission.

This amendment done in this manner is reason enough for Bersih 3.0.

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