

Malaysian EC is backward, opines fact-finding group
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By Leven Woon

A Pakistani member of a fact-finding mission group on Malaysia election opined that the local Election Commission (EC) is backward, which is a cause of the country's weak democracy.

At a press conference to release the group's interim report today, Pakistan senator Mir Hasil Khan Bizenjo said that he is surprised to find that Malaysia, as a modern country, still has an underdeveloped electoral system.

"A country like Pakistan has introduced electronic voting long ago," he said.

NONEHe said EC deputy chief Wan Ahmad Wan Omar (left), when met by the group members, gave non-committal answer about several reforms raised by the members.

"The EC needs to be improved. Only if the institution improves can the democracy of the country improve," he said.

The seven-member international group, many of whom are politicians in their own countries, was invited by opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim to conduct the mission from April 25 to 29.

They have interviewed Umno secretary-general Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Nazri Abdul Aziz, Bersih steering committee member Maria Chin Abdullah, Selangor MB Khalid Ibrahim, Anwar and Wan Ahmad on the election system for the Dewan Rakyat.

Wan Ahmad had told the group that "no current member of the EC team belongs to any political party", when the group questioned the neutrality of the EC.

"(Wan Ahmad) expressed his personal views that no member of the commission ought to belong to a political party," read the report.

This is, however, in sharp contrast to his response to Sinar Harian a few days ago in which he admitted that he is an inactive Umno member.

'Ku Nan asked whether Malaysians mature for freedom'

Meanwhile, Australian academician Clinton Fernandez noted that Tengku Adnan had asked in a meeting with the group: "Are our people (Malaysians) mature for freedom?"

Commenting on political development in Indonesia, Fernandez claimed that Tengku Adnan had said: "One of the problems with Indonesia is that there is too much freedom."

"I find these comments disturbing, it reflects the authoritarian attitudes at the highest level of power," he said.

India Today editorial director Mobashar Jawed Akbar also said he heard the statement with "deepest pain".

"It is unfortunate that some voice in authority actually believes this great nation, as a template of post-colonial nations, does not deserve democracy.

"This is a statement that cannot be accepted," he said.

In the report, the group has concurred with Bersih's demands that the campaigning period should be extended to at least 21 days and overseas voters should be allowed to vote; while it recommends that the EC constitute its own physical verification team for voters' status and make the 240,000 election workers as early voters.

They also mooted, among others, for the establishment of a Caretaker Convention as practised in the United Kingdom.

They are slated to publish a full report in 21 days.

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