

'Gov't reversal may result in massive polls fraud'

MalaysiaKini.com

May 09, 2012

By Hafiz Yatim

Former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad has expressed worry over the government's sudden move to withdraw the Election Offences Amendment Bill, which was passed with great haste on the final day of the Dewan Rakyat sitting last month.

Mahathir warned that should the government withdraw the Bill, "anything can happen and we will not be able to do anything about it."

"In other words, there is a possibility of '*penipuan besar*' (major election fraud) and nothing can be done," he said yesterday without elaborating on what he meant.

"I hope these are merely rumours and the government would not withdraw it," he said.

When told that the government had already decided to withdraw the Bill, the former premier who led the country for 22 years said probably "the government thinks it can handle the matter (electoral fraud)".

"But if I am prime minister, I am not confident, as I am not strong," added Mahathir, who had earlier officiated the launching of the book '*Towards a World War III Scenario: The Dangers of Nuclear War*' authored by Professor Michel Chossdovsky.

Yesterday, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Nazri Abdul Aziz said the decision to abort the Bill was arrived at after a 10-minute meeting between the government, the opposition and the Election Commission (EC).

"I will table the motion in the Dewan Negara tomorrow," he told reporters yesterday at the Parliament lobby.

This means the Election Offences Act remains status quo for the next general election.

Gov't merely acting as EC's 'postman'

The Bill was heavily criticised as it allows the EC, among others, to dictate when and for how long a candidate's polling and counting agents can stay at the polling stations.

The amendments passed include the proposal to remove the candidate's agents from the EC registration booth, and to remove the requirement for all printed materials to have the printers' and publishers' details.

"Amendments made to the Bill by the Senate would have to go back to the Lower House and withdrawing is a neater, better way," said Nazri.

He explained that the government had merely acted as a "postman" in tabling the Bill in Parliament, and did not know the contents which were proposed by the EC.

The Bill faced resistance from both government and opposition lawmakers, said Nazri, and he stressed that the government had tabled the Bill in toto as it respected EC's independence.

According to the minister, the last time something like this happened was three years ago, when a Bill was sent back to the Dewan Rakyat.

"But the Dewan Rakyat did not take it up within three months and it lapsed," he said.

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