

## **EC has 'two weeks left' to set up overseas vote**

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**By S Pathmawathy**

Why has the Election Commission (EC) been so silent on implementing the top recommendation of the parliamentary select committee (PSC) on electoral reform?

The DAP's Rasah parliamentarian Anthony Loke said only two weeks remain of the three-month deadline set for the EC to come up with arrangements to enable Malaysians abroad to vote.

Loke, who was in the nine-member PSC, said that developing a mechanism to allow for overseas voting topped the 22 recommendations tabled in Parliament on April 3.

We recommended to the EC (that it should) discuss with the relevant departments to come up with a roadmap and implement it in three months to ensure that this can be done before the general election.

"But we have yet to hear from the EC. This is the first recommendation in the report, so what is the status?"

Loke commended the EC's swift action in gazetting the use of indelible ink and a longer campaigning period, among other suggestions. However, its apathy on the rest of the electoral reforms "falls short of expectations".

Silent on caretaker government as well

Another recommendation that was purportedly ignored was allowing voters from Sabah and Sarawak who are working in the peninsula to vote from their locations instead of having to travel back their constituencies to vote.

Loke said the EC was also silent on the PSC's suggestion that a caretaker government be established when Parliament is dissolved.

"The PSC gave the EC three months to come up with guidelines and a code of ethics... but there's been nothing," he complained.

Even the move to insist on equal coverage by state-run media was not properly executed as only the Information, Communications and Culture Ministry, which controls Radio-Television Malaysia (RTM), concurred.

"What about the BN-controlled newspapers and other radio stations and private broadcasters?" Loke asked.

He pointed out that the EC was also yet to get cracking on efforts to clean-up the electoral roll,

especially on the defects in the voters database revealed by the Malaysian Institute of Microelectronic Systems (Mimos).

The Mimos study showed that there were 79,098 voters registered at 354 addresses, with at least 100 voters in each address.

Despite Loke's assertion, the EC has published the problematic names on its website for 30 days since mid-May.

‘Give us a guarantee on EC officers’

Loke also sought a guarantee from the EC that the returning officers posted at the 222 parliamentary constituencies would act within their powers.

A written reply from Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Mohd Nazri Abdul Aziz says the EC has, among others, adopted the PSC's recommendation to eliminate the objection period and nominee withdrawal on nomination day.

This, Loke said, was a positive move and received the consensus of the PSC members because in the past, nominations have been disqualified on technicalities such as spelling mistakes.

"Now, the returning officers have no power to reject nominations unless the candidate does not abide by constitutional prohibitions, for example, if the nominee is less than 21 years old, a bankrupt or convicted for a crime.

“An MP or state assemblyperson who did not submit elections expenses accounts of the last election to the EC will also be disqualified,” Loke explained.

"But we want the EC's assurance that its officers will be briefed to act within their limitations, and the nominees will be told to correct the technical mistakes instead of disqualifying them."