

Ambiga: Don't restrict polls observers

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By Susan Loone

Bersih chief Ambiga Sreenevasan has welcomed the naming of five non-governmental organisations by the Election Commission (EC) to monitor the coming general election.

However, Ambiga does not agree with the "unnecessary restrictions" to be placed on the NGOs.

She also expressed concerns that the NGOs may not be experienced in election monitoring and they should therefore be given the necessary training.

"This will ensure that they are competent to do the job of election monitoring," Ambiga told journalists on the sidelines of the inaugural conference of the Asean Coalition for Clean Governance in Penang today.

"We hope they are appointed very soon so that they can go through the proper training and start their tasks as soon as possible as it is not enough just to be observers," she added.

According to the EC, the NGOs would have to abide by its conditions, including a gag order on speaking to the media.

The groups named by the EC are Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (Ideas), independent pollster Merdeka Centre, Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (Asli), Transparency International-Malaysia (TI-M) and the Association for the Promotion of Human Rights (Proham).

Ideas and Asli are private think-tanks while Proham is a human rights body comprising former commissioners of the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia.

EC chief Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof (above, left) said they have been selected because they are deemed to be non-partisan and professional bodies.

Is EC chief still an Umno member?

Ambiga said Bersih also welcomed the plan by EC to invite independent monitors for the next general election - and called for this to be made "definite".

Over and above these issues, she said, Aziz also needed to resolve the allegations that he was an Umno member and if he still was, he should vacate his chairmanship since it would be a conflict of interest.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Mohd Nazri Abdul Aziz has said the EC chief was no longer an Umno member.

"Aziz has to make his position very clear as this needs to be explained to the people," Ambiga said.

She stressed that the allegations of Umno membership surrounding the EC deputy chief, Wan Ahmad Wan Mokhtar, also needed to be clarified.

"These officials are appointed under the Federal Constitution, so they cannot play the fool with their appointments," Ambiga added.

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