

Mafrel: EC using NGOs to fake transparency

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Veteran polls watchdog Malaysians for Free and Fair Elections (Mafrel) has accused the Election Commission (EC) of selecting untested NGOs as election observers as a means of creating an illusion of transparency.

Mafrel chairperson Syed Ibrahim Syed Noh (left) pointed out that of the five NGOs chosen by the EC to observe the 13th general election, none have expertise or experience in observing elections.

"Some of the NGOs, like Transparency International Malaysia (TI-M) or Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (Ideas) focus more on the theoretical aspect of elections than work on the ground.

"Maybe that is why the EC nominated them and not us," said Syed Ibrahim, whose group was once accredited by the EC to observe several by-elections and have participated in numerous international election observation missions.

The three other NGOs that will be accredited are independent pollsters Merdeka Centre, think-tank Asian Strategic and Leadership Institute (Asli) and human rights watchdog Association for the Promotion of Human Rights (Proham).

Syed Ibrahim also warned the selected NGOs to be wary of the motive and agenda behind the EC's invitation, saying that the EC only wants to create an illusion of transparency to counter claims made by election reform pressure group Bersih 2.0.

According to the New Straits Times, EC chairperson Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof had claimed that Mafrel was excluded on the grounds that they are biased and pro-opposition.

"Everyone may have their own political inclinations, but that doesn't mean we don't conduct ethical monitoring in line with international standards," said Syed Ibrahim, when told of Abdul Aziz's remarks.

Against international norms

Syed Ibrahim added that if the EC was sincere about having election observers, they would not have put restrictions on the NGOs and should have allocated a budget for the monitoring efforts.

"The conditions set are definitely not in line with international norms, where the basic principle is for the bodies to be independent and able to publish their own reports, not gagged throughout the election campaign," he pointed out.

Abdul Aziz had said that the accredited observers will not be allowed to speak to the media throughout the election campaign.

It is also understood that the reports by the NGOs will be vetted by the EC before they are made public.

One group with the expertise and experience in international election observation missions - the National Institute for Democracy and Electoral Integrity (NIEI) - has declined EC's invitation to be accredited as an official election observer.

The group said that it did so because it opposes the conditions the EC has imposed on poll monitors.

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