

Abim upset by 'arbitrary' selection of polls observers

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Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (Abim) has expressed dissatisfaction with the "arbitrary" nature of the selection of election observers by the Election Commission (EC).

The five groups accredited by the EC as poll observers do not appear to have much background in electoral monitoring, Abim president Amidi Abdul Manan told Malaysiakini.

"What are the criteria by which these non-governmental organisations were chosen? Was it based on experience, connections or prestige?" Amidi asked.

In the interest of transparency, he said, the EC should clarify the criteria it used to appoint the five NGOs.

The five are think-tanks Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (Ideas) and Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (Asli), graft watchdog Transparency International-Malaysia, human rights body Association for Promotion of Human Rights (Proham) and independent pollster Merdeka Centre.

Amidi said Abim had applied to be election observer back in April, but the EC had yet to reply.

He said unlike the five NGOs the EC has picked, Abim had some experience in observing elections, noting that his group had teamed up on this with elections monitor Malaysians for Free and Fair Elections (Mafrel) during the 1999 general election.

"We are committed to the cause of Bersih, and want to contribute towards free and fair elections in Malaysia," he said in explaining his organisation's desire to be accredited as an election observer.

EC rapped for conditions imposed

Amidi also criticised the conditions EC has imposed on its accredited observers, which include a gag order preventing them from talking to the media during the electoral campaign period.

"These conditions are not in accordance with international norms," he said.

It is understood that another condition is for the EC to vet reports by the NGOs before these are released to the public.

Although Abim will not be an accredited observer, Amidi said, it would be willing to aid the five NGOs through its extensive grassroots network in data collection.

Abim will also be giving training to election volunteers to help them spot electoral irregularities.

The NGO is not the only group that is peeved with the EC's choice of accredited election observers.

Mafrel, which was snubbed by the EC despite having international election observer experience, has also disparaged the selection of the five NGOs.

It ticked off the EC yesterday for picking the less experienced organisations in order to create the illusion of transparency.

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