

Ambiga: EC can't wait until after RCI to act
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By Nigel Aw

Bersih co-chairperson Ambiga Sreenevasan has insisted that the Election Commission (EC) immediately lays out its plans to clean up the electoral roll in light of revelations on the existence of illegal voters.

"Given that the election is around the corner, the EC owes the public an immediate response," she told a press conference in Kuala Lumpur today.

EC chief Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof (left) had last Thursday declined to comment on the revelations, made before the ongoing royal commission of inquiry (RCI) on immigrants in Sabah, until the proceedings are concluded.

However, Ambiga warned that any delay may have serious repercussions as what has been revealed at the RCI may be occurring in Peninsular Malaysia and Sarawak as well.

"(The testimony proves) that what Bersih has been saying is correct. What happened in Sabah long ago is also happening in Peninsular Malaysia now," she said.

Ambiga pointed to the Malaysian Electoral Roll Analysis Project (Merap) which she said found similar indications in the electoral roll of the fourth quarter of last year.

Merap research assistant Lee Wee Tak said one concern was with the issue of untraceable voters - an example is the case of several voters with code 71 in their MyKad number being 'stuffed' in a single address without being traceable.

Code 71 refers to people whose country of origin is unknown, special numbers were not assigned to specific countries in the past for foreigners who have become naturalised citizens.

"There were nine voters with the address 12, Jalan 4A/27A in Wangsa Maju. When we went to check the address we found it to be a roti canai shop," said Lee.

"The person in charge there said he could only recognise one of the names (registered to) his unit."

For this reason, Ambiga suggested that the RCI should be extended nationwide.

She acknowledged that there is no legal way to postpone the general election to rectify such problems but said the government could still delay it until expiry of the parliamentary term.

"It will be good if there is commitment to clean up the electoral roll between now and the

general election which has to be held, at the latest, in June.

"If (the government is) willing to postpone it to June to (allow time to) clean the electoral roll, I'm sure the civil society and public would be willing to wait."

Opacity of operations

Ambiga said civil society is also willing to assist the EC with the clean-up effort.

She noted that the EC had, last November, set up a unit to clean up the electoral roll but had been opaque about its progress.

"What has the unit done? There has been no report whatsoever. There is lack of transparency. The problem is they are not telling the public what they are doing and have not shown themselves to be independent," she said.

She reiterated her call for the EC's highest officials to resign if they fail to act on this matter immediately.

"The severity of the allegations undermine the already low public confidence in the electoral system and may impair the EC's ability to conduct elections," she said.

"Last year the EC chief said that we have the cleanest electoral roll in the world. Now that there is the RCI, what does he has to say?"

Asked if Bersih will hold more rallies to push the issue. Ambiga replied: "How many rallies will it take to get the message through?"

Bersih's immediate goal is to encourage a high voter turnout to mitigate the impact of fraud, she reiterated.

Also present at the press conference was Bersih co-chairperson A Samad Said and steering committee members K Arumugam and Liau Kok Fah.

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