

Ex-chief: Electoral roll not up to mark, but not EC's fault

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By Aidila Razak

Malaysia's electoral roll may be "clean" but it is "not up to international standards", said former Election Commission (EC) chief Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahman.

However, he said in an email interview with Malaysiakini, the EC was not at fault as the laws pertaining to registration of electors are themselves not comprehensive enough to cover certain missing areas.

NONEAbdul Rashid said instead of the "ridiculous" urgings for EC commissioners to resign, the EC should be "commended" for protecting the rights of all citizens and political parties to participate in elections.

"I give high marks to the EC for the work well done in spite of the fact that the organisation has not been equipped with proper laws that enable it to be in a proper position of power and authority."

He said among the constraints faced by the EC is its inability to relocate voters unless the voter him/herself requests to have his/her voting constituency moved.

He said that a "big chunk" of voters do not vote where they reside and this has given rise to allegations of phantom voters.

"In principle, a voter should vote where he lives (but) how do we comply with that principle in our situation unless the roll is prepared just before an election through a completely new exercise, just like a national census?" he asked.

It's neither up-to-date nor transparent

Abdul Rashid, who served for 27 years in the commission before retiring in 2009, argued that the roll is considered clean on account that it does not contain non-citizens nor underaged persons.

Yet it does not fulfil international standards because it is neither "comprehensive, inclusive, accurate, up-to-date", nor is the process in which it is compiled "fully transparent".

NONEHe said that one way to get the electoral roll up to scratch is to have automatic registration, using the National Registration Department (NRD) database.

However, he said, this would mean the government must enforce the regulation that requires all Malaysians to update their addresses with the NRD upon three months of moving.

"Otherwise, the new system would create bigger havoc than we could imagine, when at least 50 percent of the population would find their names registered to areas they no longer reside and no amount of correspondence could ever reach them."

He said that in fact, a lot of countries draw up new electoral rolls just before an election to ensure that everything is up-to-date.

"We can do it too, with political will and a sufficient budget," he said, adding that the best practices when it comes to the integrity of the electoral roll are found in Europe, New Zealand, Australia and Maldives.

Give EC more teeth

NONEOn a related topic, he said that if there was anything that must be urgently addressed coming out of the 13th general election in May, it is the laws governing elections and the EC's powers.

"As it stands today, our election laws do not provide much room for the EC to exercise its power to enhance democratic practices in elections as certain vital ingredients are sorely missing in our election laws," he said.

"The missing components in our laws had certainly brought down the image of the EC despite its excellent performance in conducting the poll."

NONEHe said that as it stands, the EC couldn't even resolve petty disputes during campaign period and have to leave everything to the police or the anti-graft commission.

"The demand by politicians and civil societies for a complete review of the election laws is most justifiable.

"The country should strive to free the election management panel from becoming the subject of electoral issues and dissatisfactions whenever an election is being conducted," he said.

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