

Probe mystery of missing ballots, EC told
Malaysiakini.com
May 1, 2007
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The Election Commission is coming under fire for its nonchalant respond to scores of ballot papers reported missing in one of the polling stations in Saturday's Ijok by-election.

According to the official results, there were 142 unreturned ballot papers in one of the five voting groups at Ijok's Pekan Berjuntai Bestari Utara polling district.

The number of missing ballots amounts to nearly 30 percent of the total of 500 ballot papers issued in the fourth voting group in Bestari Utara. Apparently, one in three voters had decided to take the ballot paper with them without casting it.

How this could have happened under the watchful eyes of a team of Election Commission officers and party scrutineers remain a mystery.

Voters in each polling districts are categorised according to their age in different groups, called voting streams. Generally, older groups are in voting streams 1, 2 and 3 while the younger ones are in 4 and 5.

All ballot papers in the other eight polling districts were accounted for except for Jaya Setia, where one ballot paper in the first voting stream was not returned.

In the hotly contested Ijok by-election, Parti Keadilan Rakyat candidate Khalid Ibrahim lost to Barisan Nasional's K Parthiban by a 1,850 vote majority amidst allegations of election irregularities and phantom voters.

In an immediate reaction, Election Commission secretary Kamaruzaman Mohd Noor argued that the practice of some voters of not returning the ballot papers occurred at every general election or by-election.

"The EC is unable to do anything. The booth to mark the ballot paper is a private place. If the voter keeps the ballot paper as a souvenir, there is nothing we can do," he told Bernama.

This is despite that offenders could be charged under the Election Offences Act and face a jail term of up to two years or RM5,000 fine.

Kamaruzaman's response did not go down well with several election experts when asked by malaysiakini to comment on the matter.

Here is what they have to say:

Wong Chin Huat, elections expert

This is a serious problem. How can people carry out their ballot papers? I can't make sense of this because there are effectively five pairs of eyes on a voter when they cast their ballot.

I can only think of two situations as to how this could happen. One is that a clerk tore off more ballots than were given out, and second, voters might have cast a dummy paper into the ballot

box (and took out the ballot paper). But what are the chances of that happening because surely when the EC officers tally the vote, they would see a bunch of papers which are not ballots?

It shows there could be some hanky-panky going on. If the polling agents had paid attention, this cannot possibly happen. Something very fishy is going on. Even one missing ballot is fishy, let alone 142. But what can the EC do? That's a good question.

This is not a new occurrence either. In the 2004 general elections, Dungun (in Terengganu) recorded 1,598 missing ballots for the parliamentary seat there. There are similar incidences and yet nothing had been done. This reflects badly on the EC

Dr Mavis Puthuchery, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's Institute of Malaysian and International Studies (Ikmas)

It is very difficult for a person to not cast a vote. There are representatives from both parties present and the ballots are counted in front of them, and these have to tally up. I would ask EC to explain the situation as to what happened and why weren't there any protest from those party representatives to this. It would be interesting to find out what they would say.

I would pursue this with the EC on the large discrepancy in this particular voting stream. I'm puzzled about this. I have never experienced such an occurrence. Some explanation has to come from Kamaruzaman. His earlier explanation is not good enough.

Ramon Navaratnam, Transparency International Malaysia president

There has been too many complaints on poll irregularities even before this by-election. I would appeal to the EC and for the government to urged the EC to revamp its whole system in the interest of integrity, transparency and democracy.

There is a need for greater accountability to taxpayers whose funds are paying EC to do their work. There must be confidence in good governance and this can be seriously eroded if the EC does not undertake to investigate the complaints between now and the coming general elections.

The EC must be responsible. It cannot dismiss the matter lightly because this goes to the survival of the country's democratic election process.

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