

Shock reversal : indelible ink plan erased
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The Election Commission has cancelled the use of indelible ink for this general election, citing public order and security issues.
MCPX

The stunning announcement was made at a press conference in Putrajaya this afternoon - four days before polling.

EC chairperson Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahman said the commission was obliged to make a "firm and final decision to ensure the smooth conduct of the 12th general election".

"Following legal advice and looking at the issue of public order and security, the EC... has decided not... to introduce the use of indelible ink," he said.

"The EC views these issues seriously, as the election process and public order and security cannot be compromised," he added. "The EC deeply regrets its decision."

Abdul Rashid said the use of indelible ink would not be effective as the country's constitution allows those who refuse to have their fingernail marked with the ink to still be issued with a ballot.

He added that the use of the indelible ink could infringe the constitutional right of a voter to cast his vote, especially if the commission tries to bar someone from voting for having an ink marked in his finger.

"From a practical point of view, the issuance of a ballot paper to such a voter would render the EC's proposal meaningless and will not bring about a positive result, whilst having the potential to create misunderstanding as well as altercations and arguments at polling stations," he said.

He added that the Federal Constitution gives Malaysians the right to vote and a black mark on the fingernail should not bar people from exercising this right, he said.

The loophole can only be removed with a constitutional amendment, which requires a vote by parliament, which has been dissolved for elections to take place.

Also present at the press conference were attorney-general Abdul Gani Patail dan inspector general of police Musa Hassan.

Police reports lodged

Abdul Rashid also said there were reports made to the police alleging that certain quarters had purchased indelible ink from abroad with the intention of creating confusion and suspicion as to the status of voters.

He added that police reports were lodged in Kelantan, Perlis and Kedah between Feb 16 and 21 and as a result four individuals are being questioned by the police.

"Their intention is to create confusion and suspicion as to the status of such voters," he said.

"This may cause chaos at polling stations which, if widespread, may be difficult to control."

"The EC views these issues seriously as the election process and public order and security cannot be compromised," he said.

The indelible ink was to be introduced for the first time in Malaysia as part of efforts to enhance transparency.

In line with this, along with the introduction of the ink, the EC had also allowed for the casting of postal ballots to be observed by polling agents and the use of transparent ballot boxes.

The EC believed that the changes would quell some of the allegations that Malaysian elections are not free and fair.

In preparation for the use of the indelible ink, the EC had previously said that it would buy approximately 48,000 bottles of indelible ink worth RM2.4mil from India.

Women voters had also been repeatedly reminded to remove their nail polish before going to the polls on March 8, as it would be difficult to apply the ink otherwise.

Fears of multiple voting

However, even before today's about-turn from the EC, questions were already being asked as to how the commission can compel voters to apply the ink as the Election (Conduct of Election) Regulation 1981 has not been amended to include the use of the indelible ink.

The EC responded by stating that voters who were against the use of indelible ink would have to fill out a form seeking to be excused before casting their vote.

The opposition has two days ago ticked off the EC for appearing to have second thoughts on the introduction of the indelible ink.

R Sivarasa, the candidate for Selangor's Subang, argued that the ink would stop possible incidences of multiple voting.

"They misled all Malaysians, not only yourselves, the voters of Malaysia and us, that they would implement the (use of) indelible ink - they also issued numerous statements about how much indelible ink would cost and they said they would buy it."