

No evidence of indelible ink smugglers
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The Election Commission's (EC) controversial decision to
MCPX

cancel the use of the indelible ink four days before the March 8 polls was based on hearsay evidence, the Dewan Rakyat was told today.

malaysia budget 2007 2008 070907 syed hamid albar This shocking revelation was made in a written parliamentary reply by Home Minister Syed Hamid Albar to Fong Po Kuan (DAP-Batu Gajah) today.

On March 4, the EC announced its last-minute decision to cancel the use of the indelible ink, long-demanded by polls reform groups to prevent electoral irregularities, citing public order and security issues.

The EC then had attributed the reasons to police reports alleging that certain quarters had purchased indelible ink from abroad with the intention of creating confusion and suspicion as to the status of voters.

However, according to the two-page parliamentary reply to the Batu Gajah MP today, the police investigation had found no evidence behind the claim after three investigation papers were opened.

"After the police reports were studied and interviews with the complainants and the witnesses, it is found that there was no evidence at all to show the ink was smuggled in from Thailand. This is because no witness has seen the ink (personally).

"From the witness statements, no individual, syndicate or any particular party was identified to be involved in this (ink smuggling). The complainant and witness' statement were based on hearsay and no individual was identified positively," Syed Hamid stated.

Investigation closed at AG's Chambers

With that, the minister added that the three investigation papers which were referred to the Attorney-General's Chambers on March 14 and 21 later were classified as "no further action".

Syed Hamid also noted that the complainants had lodged the police reports on the basis that they were worried the indelible ink can be purchased easily from Thailand and that it will be misused in the March 8 polls.

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.

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 RM2.4 million from India.

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

However, its decision to cancel the use of the ink subsequently drew flak numerous quarters, including those in the ruling parties, which expressed their outrage and disappointment.

Meanwhile Fong said that she would raise the matter further in the ongoing Dewan Rakyat sittings.

"Someone in the administration has to be responsible for providing the ill-advice leading to the decision of not using the ink, causing the waste of public funds," Fong said when met at the lobby later.

Some reactions from MPs:

Nazri Aziz (BN-Padang Rengas): The voters have the fundamental right to vote. If they say they want to vote but they don't want to use the indelible ink, do we take away their rights to vote?

To avoid an issue with the constitution, we have told the EC that it's about their fundamental rights. So that's the real reason as to why the EC cancelled the use of indelible ink.

So it's not about somebody smuggled the ink or not, it has nothing to do with the rumours.

It was up to the EC when to cancel the use of indelible ink, we had no rights or control over them when they wanted to cancel it. The last-minute announcement (of the cancellation) made the rakyat very angry, and that's how we lost through the protest votes.

Jeff Ooi (DAP-Jelutong): I think the intelligent reports must've reported that there was a turn of tides against the incumbent government so I think it was a messy tactic where you withdrew something you promised towards the end. And that clearly showed the impact.

The basis of the removal of indelible ink was unacceptable.

Shabery Cheek (BN-Kemaman): It's up to the EC's intelligence. First, we have to look at the constitutional situation. I'm not sure how the (indelible ink) can give an impact on the voting system.

In terms of security, if EC can buy the indelible ink, what's the guarantee that other people cannot buy it too?

The issue about whether the previous election was fair or not, cannot be an issue anymore. If there was an issue, how could the opposition win big by taking over five states?

Mahfuz Omar (PAS-Pokok Sena): But what happened to the cases where the police had succeeded in tracking down who the culprits were? The allegation on the smugglers of the indelible ink had been an excuse by the government, especially the police, to remove the use of in the first place.

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