

Asian polls watchdog sniffs out wrongdoings
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An international election watchdog has alleged that certain candidates in the Permatang Pauh by-election have utilised government machinery and resorted to money politics in their 10-day campaign so far.
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In its preliminary report released by its mission director Ichal Supriadi today, the Asian Network for Free Elections (Anfrel) said certain candidates have been using government vehicles and human resources to carry out campaigns.

permatang pauh 230808 posters 7It said candidates have distributed cash to people for various reasons, which can be construed as 'vote buying'.

However, Anfrel did not disclose any names.

Working in collaboration with a local election watchdog, National Institute for Electoral Integrity (NIEI), Anfrel has sent a team consisting representatives from Indonesia, Taiwan and Thailand to observe and monitor the polls on the mainland side of Penang.

The 'mother of all by-elections' will culminate with polling tomorrow, Aug 26.

The by-election has come under international spotlight due its nature of political complexities and fierce competition between Barisan Nasional and Pakatan Rakyat, and reflecting changing ideas of Malaysian democracy.

Defeats the purpose

When the Anfrel team first arrived to set up its base in Permatang Pauh, its executive director Somsri Hananuntasuk expressed hope that the by-election, given the international attention, would be free and fair.

anwar ibrahim ceramah in tok kandu permatang pauh by election 220808 03Quickly they were disappointed as polling day fell on a working day, and Somsri criticised that this "would cause unnecessary difficulties for voters to come out in full force to cast their ballot papers."

"It would surely affect those working outside Permatang Pauh for they have to seek absence from their duties, discourage voters from casting ballots," she said before the DAP-led state government announced a special public day on Tuesday.

Despite the public holiday in Penang, it could still affect a few thousands of Permatang Pauh voters working in factories in Kulim and Sungai Petani, in neighbouring Kedah.

Somsri pointed out that under the international convention the election process must accommodate the needs of all electorates - to cast their votes "easily, freely, fairly and smoothly without any hindrance and undue influence."

"The working polling day defeats the purpose," she said, chiding the Election Commission for not being up to the task of holding a credible electoral process in accordance with international standards.

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