

We Tell EC: Once Bitten, Twice Shy
MalaysianMirror.com
05 January 2012
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When Wan Ahmad Wan Omar, the deputy chairman of the Election Commission (EC) requested patience and trust in the EC, he either had his fingers crossed or believed we had short memories.

He said: "What more do they (the opposition) want? Have confidence in the EC and be patient. We will fulfill our promise", when responding yesterday, to PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang, who said that free, transparent elections could not be guaranteed with just indelible ink.

If Wan Ahmad needed reminding, this is not the first time the subject of indelible ink has been broached in our increasingly dirty elections.

In 2007, indelible ink had already been approved for use, but four days before the 2008 elections, the EC banned it. It cited a lack of constitutional amendments regarding its use. It also claimed that various quarters would sabotage the electoral process by inking the fingers of voters who had not yet voted.

Despite the National Fatwa Council approving the use of the ink for the assurance of Muslim voters, the EC and government had been ridiculed by the conspiracy theories based on hearsay and rumour.

After the 2008 polls, four men were arrested and accused for attempting to sabotage the election, but the Attorney-General failed to charge them and their arrests were not made public. In addition, the Home minister then, Syed Hamid Albar said that there was no evidence of any ink having been smuggled in from Thailand.

In essence, the plan to stop the use of the indelible ink, at the eleventh hour worked. The ban on the indelible ink cost the opposition several seats and deprived it from an outright win over BN.

Despite many allegations of BN having manipulated previous elections, the rakyat is expected to agree with claims by former PMs, including the current Najib Abdul Razak, that GE-12 was fair otherwise, how else would the opposition have won five states.

The public does have to be reminded that if the ink and other fair practices had been put into place, BN would have been ousted in 2008. That much is clear.

Why has it been suggested that indelible ink would prevent Muslims from praying? Muslims seem perfectly happy to have henna on their fingers at their weddings.

Why is the use of ink enough to prick the conscience of the voting Muslim, and yet, issues of crime, corruption, incest, polygamous marriages, hardly register with these people?

With the proposed use of ink in GE-12, around RM2 million was spent on purchasing and importing the ink. How does the EC and government justify this waste of public funds, when the ink was not used and subsequently destroyed?

In 2009, the general public was puzzled and sceptical about the plan to 'sabotage the electoral process' by inking people's fingers before they voted. They asked, "Why would anyone want to ink the fingers of someone who has yet to vote?"

At yesterday's 4 January interview, Wan Ahmad was riled by PAS's Abdul Hadi's demands that a total review of the election process and not just the indelible ink, were requisites for fair elections. PAS wanted an efficient election management, press freedom, postal balloting and clean electoral rolls.

Guided by the parliamentary select committee (PSC) on electoral reform, Wan Ahmad confirmed that the EC was improving the electoral process, and he said that the EC was being assisted by the National Registration Department to clean- up the electoral roll.

The EC is expected to announce a decision on the use of indelible ink as a means of stopping multiple voting, on 1 February.

Wan Ahmad also clarified that postal voting was transparent as it was observed by the agents of the electoral candidates.

Political observers dispute this because past elections have shown that the postal ballots have secured victories for candidates from the ruling party because of unprecedented support from postal voters. They have also demanded confidentiality of the votes of the postal voters, who are comprised of the armed forces, the police and the EC workers.

It was alleged that in the Sarawak State Elections, there was an increase in postal voters before polling day. In the constituencies of Kota Sentosa (Kuching) and Pelawan (Sibu), postal voters increased dramatically from 1,800 to 3,000 and from 14 to 300 voters, respectively.

There have been other discrepancies. The EC has admitted that "Kg Baru" has been listed as a registered voter and been told to investigate the several hundred thousand foreigners who have been given citizenship and voting rights, especially in the strategic states of Selangor, Penang and Sabah.

Wan Ahmad concluded his interview saying that nurses, doctors and journalists might be included into the category of 'early voters', but that the matter was still under consideration.

He said, "We have to consider various factors and the capability of the EC.

We will find ways to accommodate those who are unable to vote on polling day.

"We cannot deny them their right."

Events in 2008 have shown that despite the assurance about indelible ink, its use was retracted days before the election. Therefore, who is to say that the same will not be done in GE-13? Once bitten, twice shy.

If Wan Ahmad wants Malaysians, not just the opposition, to trust the EC, he should ensure that the EC is independent and is not beholden to any political party. That is our right.

To convince us of its commitment to clean and fair elections the EC should implement the eight point demands of Bersih 2.0 and allow international election observers for GE-13. Only then will the rakyat be convinced of its sincerity.

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