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No decision on action against EC chairman: PM

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pg 8-9

THE government has yet to decide on any kind of action against Elections Commission (EC) chairman Tan Sri Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahman for blaming the cabinet on the cancellation of the use of indelible ink in the 12th general election.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said

this in a written reply to Lim Guan Eng (DAP-Bagan), who asked whether action will be taken against Abdul Rashid for allegedly cheating the people by saying the cancellation was due to security reasons.

"The government respects the EC as an independent body and if there were contradictions, the government

will explain what happens from the view of the government," Abdullah said.

"However, the government really hopes that the EC would distance itself from making possible confusing statements, for the sake of the commission's credibility and the integrity of the democratic process and election itself."

He said that as a competent and independent authority, the EC has been entrusted with the responsibility to decide whether to use the indelible ink or not, after taking into consideration the cabinet's suggestion.

The cabinet has never instructed Abdul Rashid to cancel the usage of the ink but has said it did not support the move because it could be unconstitutional under Article 199 of the Federal Constitution.

On May 17, in a seminar titled *National Seminar on Election 2008: Democracy at work*, Abdul Rashid alleged that the cabinet was behind the decision to scrap the use of indelible ink.

However, he said he was forced to take the rap for the decision which attracted accusations from political parties and non-governmental organisations. He also fell victim to vandals who splashed paint on his house.

At the seminar, organised by International Islamic University Malaysia's Electoral

Studies Research Unit, Abdul Rashid also said it was time to review the electoral laws that have become the root of all the problems faced by the EC.

Abdul Rashid, who is due to retire in December, proposed that a committee, comprising former judges, review the electoral laws with the aim of strengthening and defending democratic practices.

He also expressed concern that the EC lacks the necessary power to act in providing the level-playing field that is duly required in any elections.

"If people don't believe that we are independent, then the laws should be reviewed and, of course, that is not within the power of the EC to decide but as chairman, I would consider reviewing the electoral laws as timely," Abdul Rashid told delegates at the seminar.

"This review should be urgently considered. There is a need to enhance and strengthen the power of the EC where it can decide what's right and wrong.

"When the EC can have control over all political parties, control over abuses and excesses, it is only then that we can be considered a proper electoral body that is ideal in a democracy."

According to Abdul Rashid, the laws that should be reviewed include the Election Act, the Election Offences Act, the Elections (Conduct of Elections) Regulations and the Elections (Registration of Electors) Regulations as well as Articles 113 to 120 in the Federal Constitution.