

**Bersih: 'Security risk' for ballot boxes if early vote count disallowed**  
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**By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal**

KUALA LUMPUR, March 13 — The Election Commission (EC) must guarantee the security of ballot boxes on polling day in the coming polls if it plans to ban the early counting of vote, Bersih 2.0 said today.

The EC said earlier today the rise of new media and text messages to relay results instantly and influence voting elsewhere has prompted the commission move to stop the early counting of ballots in the next general elections.

The EC spotted the trend during the Sarawak state election last April, saying the latest move will affect mainly the smaller polling stations in Sabah and Sarawak which close early due to the low number of voters in both states.

EC deputy director Datuk Wan Ahmad Wan Omar reminded that the early announcement of results was considered "illegal" as only the commission has the jurisdiction to endorse and announce the final outcome of polls.

"While I understand the reason for delaying the counting I am not convinced this outweighs the security risks to the ballot boxes. The security of the ballot boxes will now take centre stage. How are they proposing to ensure this?" Bersih chairman Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan told The Malaysian Insider via text message.

"It follows that if they are not going to count immediately then they have to keep (the) boxes very secure," she added.

One of the ways to guarantee the security of the ballot boxes, said Ambiga was to allow party agents full access to polling stations, and that they must be consulted and kept informed.

"We also suggest that polling stations for the military and police be held away from their barracks and police stations and be conducted in a public place. Of course indelible ink must be used. The EC must publicly address these issues," the former Bar Council president stressed.

EC chairman Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Yusof made an announcement in Kota Kinabalu earlier today that early ballot counting would no longer be allowed in the coming general election.

According to The Star Online, Abdul Aziz had said that this was because the EC had noticed the agents of some candidates leaking early results via SMS or social network sites like Twitter.

Concurring, Wan Ahmad explained that the decision was made after "several bad experiences" during the April polls in Sarawak last year.

He said that several voting centres in the remote areas of the east Malaysian state had to be closed by 1pm and due to this, the EC had at the time allowed tallying to begin by 2pm.

"But one or two party leaders decided to speak to the media already... even announcing that they had won in certain streams and gave the majorities too.

"Their purpose was probably as a morale booster to the other candidates but this was a distraction to those who were still voting," he said.

As such, he said, the EC would only allow tallying to commence after 5pm, when polling ends at all stations.

"We do not want this confusion repeated. We will return to our original practice, which is counting the ballots after polling closes," he said.

Wan Ahmad added that the change only involves amendments to EC regulations.

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