

EC stops early vote count to end 'illegal' results leak
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, March 13 — The rise of new media and text messages to relay results instantly and influence voting elsewhere has prompted the Election Commission (EC) to 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 today 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 Wan Ahmad explained that the decision was made after "several bad experiences" during the April polls in Sarawak last year. — file pic
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.

He added that this would also influence voting patterns and disrupt the polling process if parties celebrate premature victories while voters are still casting their ballot papers elsewhere.

"Supposedly a candidate wins in one particular ballot box, and the counting agents transmit this information by SMS... then party leaders, without respecting the fact that the rest of the boxes are still voting, announce their victories.

"This is not accepted by law because the announcement of the final results can only be known after all the ballot boxes for the polls are counted," he told The Malaysian Insider.

Wan Ahmad was explaining EC chairman Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Yusof's 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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