

Pakatan: Vote-tampering likely if early count nixed
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By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal

KUALA LUMPUR, March 14 — The Election Commission's (EC) move to stop the early counting of ballots in the next general election raises the possibility of vote tampering, Pakatan Rakyat (PR) lawmakers have said.

Opposition MPs questioned the commission's "hasty" move, saying it must not be done without consulting stakeholders such as political parties and electoral reform watchdog Bersih 2.0.

"The EC is setting the stage for massive irregularities of votes in the country. The current system has worked, why change it?" DAP MP Charles Santiago told The Malaysian Insider.

He accused the EC of "pre-empting" the voting process, saying there is no proof that an early ballot count would influence voting patterns.

"There has to be consultation with stakeholders. There is also the question of transparency. How will we know that the tabulated votes have not been tampered with?" the Klang MP asked.

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

The EC spotted the trend during the Sarawak state election last April and said yesterday the latest move would mainly affect the smaller polling stations in Sabah and Sarawak which close early due to the low number of voters in certain polling districts.

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 the polls.

But PKR vice-president Fuziah Salleh said that while she understood the EC's reasoning, there is still the "fear" that the newly-proposed method could lead to vote-tampering.

"The move is aimed towards places, polling stations that are remote, with a lower population, which close by 2pm because of the low number of voters in these states.

"But will tallying, counting of votes be done before or after the ballot boxes are brought to the main polling centre? How do we know whether it will be counted properly?" she told The Malaysian Insider.

The Kuantan MP said that polling agents from both PR and Barisan Nasional (BN) must be present to witness the tallying of votes, which must be done immediately once polling ends at 5pm.

The EC is setting the stage for massive irregularities of votes in the country. — DAP MP

Charles Santiago

"They must count the ballots there before bringing the ballot boxes to the polling centre," she added.

EC chairman Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Yusof made an announcement in Kota Kinabalu yesterday that an early ballot count 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

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