

Incorporate civil society in EC, says polls group
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By Yow Hong Chieh

PETALING JAYA, March 30 — Appointments to the Election Commission (EC) must be made more transparent and membership should be opened up to civil society leaders, a polls reform group said today.

National Institute for Democracy and Electoral Integrity (NIEI) acting chairman K. Shan said the inclusion of civil society would promote a more proactive mindset rather than the current "civil service kind of approach" which was reactionary.

"Reform should be a regular process which takes place all the time, not only when people challenge you to look into it," he said after unveiling the 2011 National Voter Registration Audit by NIEI and the Merdeka Center at Hotel Singgahsana here.

Shan said opening up the EC to NGOs would also help "balance (public) perception" that it was subservient to the executive, urging the EC to adopt the membership model used by the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam).

He added that the EC should be taken out from being under the purview of the Prime Minister's Department to combat the perception that the commission was a political tool of the ruling coalition.

The commission should also hold consultations with the public and provide stakeholders tools to assess the electoral process as well as clearly identify actions they can take to improve it.

The government formed a parliamentary select committee five months ago after public anger towards the nation's "unfair" electoral process spilled out onto the streets during the Bersih 2.0 rally last year.

Thousands of people choked the capital's streets during the July 9 rally to demand free and fair elections despite the widespread lockdown by the Najib administration before the tumultuous event took place.

Critics allege that thousands of phantom voters, including non-citizens, have been entered into the electoral roll, and have urged the prime minister not to call elections before the select committee's recommendations are fully implemented.

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