

Polls group wants new department to register voters
The Malaysian Insider
March 30, 2012
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PETALING JAYA, March 30 — Putrajaya should set up a Database Department with branches in each local council authority to help sign up eligible voters, a polls reform group said today.

The National Institute for Democracy and Electoral Integrity (NIEI) said the department would act as the primary registrar and will be tasked with maintaining and managing the electoral roll.

It will also have the power to regularly inspect and amend the voter list to ensure it is free from erroneous information and errors, NIEI acting chairman K. Shan explained.

He said this was necessary as the Election Commission (EC) has so far not been able to maintain an up-to-date electoral roll due to rapid as well as repeated changes in address and voting location by an increasingly mobile workforce.

"This is a very strong, fast-moving development that the Election Commission has failed to keep up with," he said after unveiling the 2011 National Voter Registration Audit by NIEI and the Merdeka Center at Hotel Singgahsana here.

Shan stressed, however, that the EC should remain responsible for the final gazette of the electoral roll and serve as an oversight and managing body to the department and its officers.

He also urged the commission to cease letting "non-accountable" third-party agencies register voters as lack of sufficient monitoring and oversight mechanisms meant that applications were sometimes lost.

"Sometimes some forms go missing... It happens, this kind of thing happens," he said.

Shan added that the government should improve voter registration using "computerised mechanisms", saying that to ensure accuracy of its information the Database Department should regularly cross-check voters' personal details with the National Registration Department (NRD).

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.

The Malaysian Insider

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