

Election Offences Act changes scrapped
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BILL WITHDRAWN: Misgivings on both sides

KUALA LUMPUR: THE government has decided to withdraw all amendments to the Election Offences Act after much protest from parties across the political divide.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz said the decision was made after a 10-minute discussion between the Election Commission, opposition lawmaker Lim Kit Siang, Dewan Negara President Tan Sri Abu Zahar Ujang and himself.

He said the cabinet had earlier agreed to withdraw the Amendment Bill due to the resistance it had received.

The bill, with three amendments, was passed by the Dewan Rakyat last month after heated debate.

It was due to be debated in the Dewan Negara with two additional amendments, making it a total of five amendments to the bill. If approved by the house, it would have been sent back to the lower house for approval.

Speaking at a press conference in Parliament yesterday, Nazri said he would be tabling a motion today to withdraw the bill as that would be the easiest way of resolving it.

"Looking at the Internet, there are many rejections to the bill. This reflects the people's views.

"We think that too many amendments to the bill will result in a messy situation and the amendments will lose their purpose."

Nazri said the government first accepted the amendments because it did not want to be seen as interfering in the EC's duties.

Nazri said although Barisan Nasional members of parliament had voted for the bill, many were opposed to it as the amendments meant that their agents would be prohibited from monitoring EC booths during the polling process.

Another proposed change was the extension of the current 50-metre exclusion zone from the polling centres to 100m or any distance that the EC deems fit.

This also earned the ire of many, who said it would make it harder for party representatives to monitor what was going on at the polling centres.

The other amendment was to remove the requirement for all, printed materials to have printers and publishers' details.

On another issue, Nazri said EC chairman Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Yusof was no longer an Umno member as checks at the Umno branch where he had been registered showed that his membership had lapsed.

"This happened 30 years ago. He was living next to a surau, and all the surau people were Umno members who impressed upon him to be a member."

Nazri said this was revealed by Aziz to him yesterday morning.

"He told me the initial membership fee was paid by the surau people but he had never paid the fee in the following years and his membership lapsed."

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