

GE13: Mark ballot papers properly, says Election Commission

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PUTRAJAYA: With the 13th general election predicted to be the most keenly contested in the country's history, the Election Commission has appealed to the 13.3 million voters not to spoil their votes as each one will be especially precious this time around.

Voters must place a neat 'X' in the box next to the name and symbol of their preferred candidate but a small number will mark both candidates or make a variety of other markings on their ballot papers in a sign of protest, spoiling their votes in the process.

On the surface, the problem does not appear to be serious, affecting only 2.2% of the ballots cast for Parliament seats and 2.1% for state seats in the last general election constituting 324,120 of the 15.2 million ballots cast.

But a closer look at the results showed that there are at least nine Parliamentary seats and 27 state seats where the number of spoilt votes was bigger than the majorities of the winning candidates.

Commission chairman Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof said the results in these constituencies could have been different if voters did not spoil their votes.

The status of each ballot would be determined through consensus among the presiding officer and agents of the candidates at the polling stream based on a set of guidelines set by the commission (see graphic).

Abdul Aziz said most spoilt votes were purposely done in protest but a small number involved illiterate older voters who are unsure how to mark the ballots.

He said the strangest spoilt vote was one where the voter wrote on his ballot paper to express his frustration at not being selected as a candidate.

"The general rule is that if there is a clear indication about the intent or choice of the voter, the ballot will be accepted," said Abdul Aziz.

A neatly marked 'X' is ideal, but the EC provides some flexibility and will accept other types of markings in order to give the benefit of the doubt to voters who may be unaware of how to properly mark their ballots.

Aside from an 'X', a clear and legible circle, tick, asterisk or even dot will also count as an accepted vote (see graphic).

It is not, however, a free-for-all. Certain types or markings are considered as spoiling the ballot, including an 'X' into the space of the other candidate or any offensive or sensitive words written on the ballot paper.

Deputy EC chief Datuk Wan Ahmad Wan Omar said some ballots were spoilt by voters who wanted to prove to their superiors that they had cast their ballots despite not supporting either candidates.

"They turn up just so that their attendance will be recorded by the polling clerk," said Wan Ahmad.

Barisan Nasional secretary-general Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor said the coalition had already reminded component party members in various training sessions against spoiling their votes.

He said there were cases in 2008 where Barisan supporters spoilt their votes to protest against some "parachute" candidates.

PAS secretary-general Datuk Mustafa Ali said most of those who spoil their votes did so intentionally but there was little that anyone could do as it was not against any law.

"But while the percentage of spoilt votes may be small, we cannot say it is unimportant as there are seats lost by just several votes."

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