

EC Clarifies That RM400 Million Was Budget Estimate For GE13
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PUTRAJAYA, July 7 (Bernama) -- The Election Commission (EC) has clarified that the RM400 million it was said to have spent for the 13th General Election (GE13) was actually the ceiling of budget estimates approved by the finance ministry, and not the actual expenditure.

Its deputy chairman, Datuk Wan Ahmad Wan Omar, said the total amount spent during GE13 would only be known when the expenditure account was closed, as payments were still being made by state EC offices.

"In terms of budget, we are transparent because the Treasury will ensure that each cost is accompanied by details and eventually, examined and audited.

"Based on our experience, the expenditure will not exceed the ceiling approved. The EC policy is, when we ask for an allocation, we do not like to do things half-way due to lack of budget. So, we will request for a big amount or budget," he said in an interview with Bernama here recently.

Opposition members of parliament questioned the rationale behind the EC's expenditure in GE13 as the figure mentioned by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim in the Dewan Rakyat on Tuesday.

Shahidan said RM400 million was spent in GE13, which the opposition claimed was double than that of the 12th General Election, while the number of voters increased by only 20 per cent.

According to him, the amount included overtime payment of RM5.081 million, logistics, which included vehicle rentals, ICT equipment and lease line (RM98.465 million); service and token payment for workers (RM204.1 million) and other expenses (RM92.354 million).

Wan Ahmad said the ceiling increase was based on estimates presented by state EC offices, prior to submission for consideration and approval by the Treasury.

"The amount of allocation increases after each general election, due to the prevailing situation. The Treasury normally approves a large sum, but it is disbursed in stages, including before the general election," he said.

For example, the budget was also spent to conduct a series of training for EC personnel in all states, one year before GE13.

He said 235,000 people were on the EC payroll during GE13, including returning officers, assistant returning officers, law enforcement officers and guides at polling stations, but denied they were given a bonus as claimed.

"No bonus, only allowances. A report that EC staff received a bonus was not true. The allowance increased as we take inflation into account," he added.

Wan Ahmad said a large sum of money was also spent on service charges and souvenirs for

EC staff and election workers such as caps, T-shirts, vests, umbrellas and souvenirs like pens, compact discs and guidebooks.

"They are meant for 235,000 people. They are also given as gifts to those who attended election briefings, including political party representatives and their staff," he said.

He also said the EC bore the cost of the election petitions, while the expenses incurred in some parliamentary constituencies were higher than others due to the geographical terrain.

"In Sabah and Sarawak, the EC had to hire over 60 helicopters and more than 1,000 speedboats," he said, adding that despite the escalating cost to hold GE13, it was a worthy cause.

"We need to see it, in terms of continuity of the democratic process. There was nothing wrong with it. Some developed countries are willing to spend millions of dollars to help underdeveloped countries conduct a democratic process.

"For our country, we have not asked a single sen from external sources (to conduct a general election) because we want to protect the sovereignty of the democratic process of our country," he added.

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