

'I KNOW MY JOB'

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Election Commission chief tells critics to get the facts right

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PUTRAJAYA: Get your facts right before telling me how to do my job.

This is Election Commission chairman Tan Sri Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahman's response to detractors critical of his role and that of the EC in the electoral process.

He was upset that some pressure groups, researchers and political parties did not understand the EC's hands were tied in some matters.

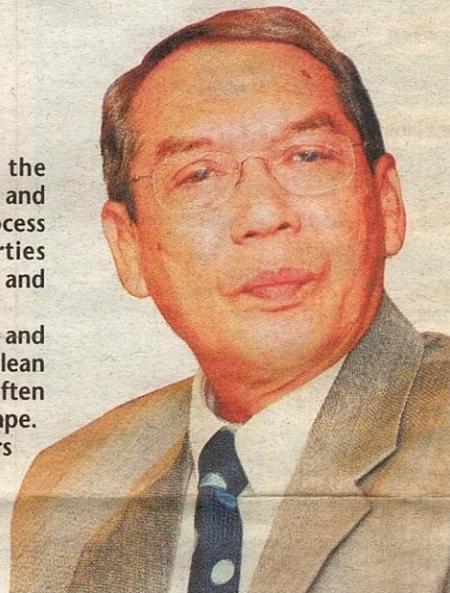
Rashid, who had overseen the running of six of the country's 11 general elections, said the EC was merely the implementing

agency in elections.

"Has anyone tried talking to the government? If they want changes and if these were to enhance the process of democracy, I am sure all parties concerned will be able to sit down and discuss them," he said.

Groups such as Malaysians for Free and Fair Elections and the Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (Bersih) have often asked the EC to do away with red-tape.

Citing an example, he said voters in New Zealand had in 1993 approved a referendum to change its electoral system to a proportional representation system.



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An upset Tan Sri Abdul Rashid speaks out

Rashid: Enforcement of Act
will end phantom voter issue

He said poor enforcement of some laws was also preventing the EC from tightening election loopholes.

Rashid said the issue of “phantom voters” could be put to rest if rule 15 of the National Registration Act 1990 was strictly enforced to prevent people from returning to vote in their original constituencies.

Under the law, citizens who change their address have to inform the National Registration Department within 90 days so that they can be registered to vote in their new area.

But this is seldom done, resulting in people going back to vote in constituencies where they had originally registered.

This has led to repeated claims of phantom voters by political parties.

“Of the 10 million registered voters, close to four million do not live in the place they are initially registered. Some people have called them phantom voters but we cannot stop them from voting.”

Rashid said political parties, particularly the opposition, had often accused the commission of moving voters in favour of the ruling government.

“As long as the provision is not amended, the EC will never be able to produce a single roll to satisfy all parties.

“But as chairman, I can guarantee that we have never registered an ineligible individual or a non-citizen.”

Rashid said provisions in Article 119 of the Federal Con-

stitution also hindered the implementation of automatic registration for those who turned 21.

He said the key to overcoming these problems was for the public to engage the government in a dialogue over the possibility of amending the laws.

On electronic voting, Rashid said this may not be feasible at the moment.

“I have people telling me that voters in India vote electronically. But the fact is this is only done in big cities and only involves about 30 per cent of the people in that area.”

Such a plan would also be costly to implement in remote areas in Sabah, Sarawak and certain parts of the peninsula.

Rashid said the average turnout of 75 per cent during elections was the average rate in many developing countries.

On suggestions that those who had already voted have one of their fingers marked with indelible ink, Rashid said there it was not necessary as Malaysians had sufficient proof of identification.

On his previous suggestion that political parties be registered with the commission rather than the Registrar of Societies, Rashid said this was the practice in many advanced democracies.

“This would give the EC better control over political parties. It was to give us more clout to act against them rather than leaving the matter to the police.”

Rashid added that this would enable the EC to better discipline political parties, particularly during elections.

LIST OF SOME DEMANDS

from pressure groups/researchers/political parties

- an Election Monitoring Commission be set up to monitor any breach of violation of election laws
- establish a voter assistance and complaints unit at polling centres to address complaints on polling day
- conduct a re-registration exercise to address serious inaccuracies and irregularities in the roll
- provide electoral rolls validated for any election with complete and unambiguous residential address of voters
- introduce an “elector’s card” to verify the status of the voter
- allow polling agents to check voters’ identification card before polling
- mark voters’ fingers with indelible ink to prevent impersonation and multiple voting
- use transparent ballot boxes
- publish a “media coverage code of conduct” for balanced reporting
- allow international election observers as well as non-partisan domestic election observers
- allow members of the armed forces and the police to cast their ballots as other voters and abolish postal votes
- provide a minimum two-week period for campaigning purposes

