

Indelible ink halal, says fatwa council

LAST HURDLE CLEARED:

Election Commission can now go ahead with the purchase for the next general election

KOI KYE LEE
PUTRAJAYA

kklee@nst.com.my

THE final hurdle for indelible ink to be used in the 13th general election was cleared yesterday when the National Fatwa Council ruled the substance to be halal.

The decision was made at a *muzakarah* (meeting), attended by the council's 22 members, representatives from the Election Commission and the Chemistry Department, at the Islamic Development Department (Jakim).

Council chairman Tan Sri Dr Abdul Shukor Husin said the *muzakarah* arrived at the decision based on the findings of the Chemistry Department.

"The indelible ink, if applied to Muslims, can absorb water and it does not pose any

problem for them to perform their ablutions or prayers. The use of the ink will not interfere with a Muslim's faith.

"So, as long as the same ink sent for analysis is used, we see no obstruction for Muslim voters to use it."

The EC informed the council that the ink sent to the Chemistry Department for analysis would be the same one that would be used in the general election.

The council's decision had hinged on three conditions — that the ink was not contaminated with waste, not hazardous and permeable.

In an immediate reaction, chairman of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Electoral Reforms Datuk Seri Dr Maximus Ongkili said the EC could now proceed with the necessary preparations for the use of the ink in the next general election.

"This will include amendments to the election regulations, training of officers on the application of the ink as well as the procurement of the substance."

EC secretary Datuk Kamaruddin Mohamed Baria, who welcomed the decision, said: "We

agree with the decision made by the council."

The use of indelible ink in the 2008 general election was scrapped after police received reports of a plan to "sabotage" the election process in Perlis, Kedah and Kelantan.

Police investigations uncovered a plot to trick village folk into believing that their fingerprints had to be marked, using smuggled ink from a neighbouring country, before they could go to vote.

The use of indelible ink was first proposed in June 2007 to safeguard against multiple or phantom voting.

The EC had also decided to cancel the use of the ink, citing concerns about the constitutionality of the measure. Without a constitutional amendment permitting the practice, it could be illegal for a polling clerk to "stop a voter from voting even if his or her finger was already marked with the ink.

EC chairman Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Yusof had said the ink would have four to seven per cent silver nitrate and could last up to seven days. The colour of the ink would remain a secret to prevent sabotage, he said.

"This will include amendments to the election regulations, training of officers on the application of the ink as well as procurement of the substance."
Datuk Seri Dr Maximus Ongkili
Parliamentary Select Committee on Electoral Reforms chairman