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Cabinet gives the green light for all-year-round voter registration

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - The Cabinet today decided against an automatic voter registration system but gave the go-ahead for the implementation of all-year round registration.

Under the latter system, new registrants will get their voter status confirmed within weeks.

This also means that those who turn 21 will be able to register as voters anytime of the year from next year.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Rais Yatim said amendments to Article 119 of the Federal Constitution on the qualification of voters would be tabled at the Dewan Rakyat during the current session.

It will be tabled by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"Under the proposed amendments, an individual who turns 21 will be able to register with the Election Commission anytime.

"The application will then be gazetted within a few weeks and he will become a registered voter. It will be done very fast," he said when contacted.

Consequently, the current practice of the commission to conduct an annual voter registration exercise over a 42-day period would be done away with.

The commission had earlier proposed that an automatic registration system be introduced to address the "phantom voter" issue and to ensure non-citizens could not fraudulently acquire voting status.

The New Straits Times had recently reported that the commission proposed the automatic registration system due to criticisms over the delay in gazetting the electoral roll.

This, the critics claimed, had resulted in many applicants not being able to vote during general elections or by-elections.

At present, the commission takes about nine months to complete the entire exercise.

On another matter, Rais said Article 6 of the Federal Constitution would be amended to allow persons convicted of minor offences to undertake community service.

Although the proposal was made some time ago, it could not be adopted as Article 6 prohibited all forms of forced labour.

The proposal then was to allow first-time offenders jailed for minor offences to serve part of the sentence doing community service.

The period of service could be half of the sentence.

Rais said Article 45 would also be amended to allow senators replacing those who had died to complete a full three-year term.

"At present, if a senator dies after serving one year, his replacement will only be allowed to complete the deceased's remaining two years.

"Under the proposed amendment, the new senator will be allowed to complete a full three-year term," he said.

Rais said Articles 56 and 57 would also be amended to allow the Dewan Rakyat Deputy Speaker and Dewan Negara Deputy President to be employed full-time.

"They will be employed on a full-time basis just like the Dewan Rakyat Speaker and Dewan Negara President."

This amendment takes effect from Jan 1, 2001.

Also to be amended is Article 65 of the Constitution.

"Under this article, the secretary of the Dewan Rakyat will also retire

at 56 years like any other civil servant and not at 55," Rais said.