

**M'sian expats may get voting rights but...**

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**By Kuek Ser Kuang Keng**

The Election Commission (EC) intends to seek amendments to election laws during the scheduled June sitting to enable Malaysians to vote overseas by post.

“Our target is (the) June sitting,” said the EC deputy chairperson Wan Ahmad Wan Omar during a dialogue with the Foreign Correspondent's Club last night in Kuala Lumpur.

The amendments proposed by the EC will stipulate two conditions for Malaysians residing overseas to be entitled to vote.

First, the person must be registered as an ordinary voter with the EC.

Second, the person must have returned to Malaysia once over the past five years to qualify as an postal voter. Australia has set this condition for its citizens abroad.

Wan Ahmad said those seeking to vote from overseas might be required to apply to be a postal voter by filling up a form that will be available on the EC's website.

Malaysian missions will be tasked with distributing the postal ballots to the eligible postal voters.

The voter would then be responsible for ensuring that the ballots reach the respective returning officers in Malaysia.

“The ballots must reach the returning officers before 5pm on polling day,” he explained.

**Ball on Najib's court**

Should Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak call for polls before the June sitting, this new system will not be implemented for the 13th general election, said Wan Ahmad.

A journalist later quizzed Wan Ahmad on the need for the amendments, because Section 3(1)(e) of the Elections (Postal Voting) Regulations 2003 already empowered the EC to designate any category of voters as postal voters.

The journalist pointed out that the EC had exercised their discretion based on this provision to include the spouses of Police General Operations members as postal voters in the previous elections.

While admitting that this was true, Wan Ahmad explained that the amendments were needed to impose the condition which required overseas postal voters to return to Malaysia at least once in five years.

Asked if the EC will persuade Najib to only call for polls after the amendments were passed,

Wan Ahmad replied in the negative.

“Never before in the history of Malaysia, the EC tells the prime minister when to call election. Never. Because we respect the prerogative of the government of the day,” he stressed.

Despite calls by the opposition parties and civil society, Najib has refused to give a guarantee that the general election will only be held after electoral reforms are implemented.

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