

M'sian missions 'not aware of EC directive on voters'

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By S Pathmawathy & Christine Chan

Several Malaysians working overseas have come to the fore to debunk the Election Commission's (EC) claim that the response to its call for citizens living abroad to register at the respective Malaysian embassies and high commissions has been poor.

In fact, they claimed it is the embassies and high commissions which are in the dark over the EC directive, and they urged the EC to give a clear set of directives and information to the diplomatic missions.

On June 14, EC chairperson Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof lamented that there had been a poor response to its call, saying only 400 to 500 had registered so far.

These, he said, include those who can be postal voters that is civil servants, military officers and students studying there. There are about one million Malaysian overseas who are eligible to vote.

However, Abdul Aziz admitted that the amendments to the Elections (Registration of Electors) Regulations 2002, are still with the Attorney-General's Chambers.

Responses follow from overseas Malaysians:

Soon Yee Yap, civil engineer in Perth, Australia

I called the Perth consulate on June 15, and the staff responded to my query about registration by saying they can register us but we would still have to go back to Malaysia to vote.

They didn't even ask if I was with the military, a civil service employee or a student. When I asked for clarification on the EC's claim in Malaysiakini recently, they claimed that there have been no new instructions from Malaysia. Hence, no arrangement has been made for polling stations to be set up in embassies or consulates.

Charis Quay, lecturer, Paris, France

I have not heard of any 'calls' to register to vote in Paris. To my knowledge the Paris embassy has been silent on this issue. The last communication I received from them was about the Talent Corporation. In any case, I registered to vote as soon as I attained the age of 21, and so far have never been able to vote. The EC will probably see more people registering if and when it becomes possible to vote from abroad.

See-See Leong, software architect, United Kingdom

I do not believe there were 'loud calls' - there certainly was no campaign at the high commission

in the UK to ask overseas Malaysians to pre-register in the way the EC suggested. No one has the time to go all the way to the high commission on a working day for such a charade.

Frederick Lim, accountant, United Kingdom

I called the London High Commission and they said they have not received any instructions from the EC to register Malaysians working in the UK. They said this was only for registered students, government servants and military personnel, and even then, the staff have no clue how they are going to cast their ballots.

The high commission staff suggested that others may have to fly home to cast their ballots as there is no polling station in London.

For those who are working here, there is no instruction to even register. The staff members said many Malaysians working in the UK have called but she cannot do anything to register them because there has been no instructions from the EC. If we manage to register, we still have to fly home to cast our ballots, the staff members said.

‘EC has lost the plot’

Non-governmental organisation MyOverseasvote.org has claimed that Abdul Aziz has lost touch with reality and is shifting the blame to overseas Malaysians over its failure to register them as voters.

In a press release, the NGO asked how Malaysians overseas could register as postal voters with Malaysian embassies when there is no provision in the EC regulations for them to vote via post.

Those currently allowed to be postal voters are serving members of the military, civil servants working there or students.

“Since October 2010, MyOverseasVote has been campaigning for all Malaysians overseas to be given the right to vote by post.” the statement reads.

"In August 2011, Abdul Aziz announced that the EC would extend postal voting to all Malaysians overseas, but nearly a year later, nothing has been done by the EC to allow Malaysians overseas to register as postal voters.

“Overseas Malaysians who do not fall within the categories above are only able to register as ordinary voters who must return to Malaysia to vote.”

Responding to Abdul Aziz’s comments to Malaysiakini, the NGO said that, in 2011, six overseas Malaysians had applied to register as absent voters at the London High Commission, only to discover that they had been registered by the EC as ordinary voters.

They are now challenging the EC’s decision and its regulations in a Court of Appeal on July 26. This comes after the Kuala Lumpur High Court rejected the application for judicial review by the

six Malaysians based in United Kingdom, saying the EC had acted correctly.

Under Article 25(2) of the federal constitution, Malaysians who have obtained citizenship are required to register annually with the Malaysian consulate if they wish to retain their Malaysian citizenship while residing overseas.

But for Malaysians who are citizens by birth, or otherwise by operation of law, there is simply no reason to register with the Malaysian embassy or consulate unless consular assistance is required, especially if the EC refuses to allow them to vote by post.

Lengthy process

Registering as an absent voter under the 2002 Registration of Electors Regulations is a three-to-six-month process as lengthy as registering a new voter, as it involves public display, inspection, objections and quarterly gazetting of the supplementary electoral roll.

Until late last year, Malaysian students overseas were required to take time off from their studies and travel in person to the Malaysian embassy or high commission in the capital city, which are only open for voter registration on weekday mornings, if they wished to register.

For this reason, the parliamentary select committee (PSC) on electoral reform recommended that overseas Malaysians be added as a category of postal voters, who do not need to go through the process.

However, as of now, the 2003 Postal Voting Regulations do not allow for the registration of overseas Malaysians as postal voters.

The PSC tabled its final recommendations on April 3, and gave the EC a three-month deadline for implementation of its recommendations.

Many overseas Malaysians, said the NGO, have already registered themselves as ordinary voters and have been waiting anxiously since August 2011 for the EC to announce the forms and procedures for registering as a postal voter.

“It is a travesty of the highest order that the EC chairperson should now be trying to divert attention and shift the blame to overseas Malaysians for his commission’s failure to meet the PSC’s deadline of July 3,” MyOverseasVote said.

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