

Overseas vote: Ex-PSC duo says EC 'buying time'
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By Leven Woon

The Election Commission's (EC) decision to amend laws to facilitate voting for Malaysians residing overseas could be a delay tactic, warned two former members of the Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) on electoral reforms.

The duo - Anthony Loke from DAP and Dr Hatta Ramli from PAS - said the EC's can avoid the hassle of going through Parliament and invoke Section 16 of the Election Act 1958 to implement new rules.

At a press conference today, Loke said relevant proposals on such a mechanism has been made by the PSC earlier this year and thus the EC has a template to follow.

To start off, Loke argued that the EC could either amend the Election (Postal Voting) Regulations or Registration of Elector Regulations to include Malaysians overseas into the distance voting category.

He said the second part of Clause (F) of the Election (Postal Voting) Regulations, EC is empowered to classify anyone from any category as a postal voters via a gazette notice.

No need to wait

Additionally, EC can expand the definition of absentee voters under the Registration of Elector Regulation, which currently only covers army personnel, civil servants and students living overseas.

"EC does not need to amend the election law they can just add in another line or another sentence saying that Malaysians living abroad are now defined as absentee voters.

"There is already an existing mechanism. We don't want to see EC keep on buying time. After more than three months, they come back to us unsure (of what to do)," he said.

Loke, the Rasah parliamentarian, said EC's legal advisor can prepare draft amendments, have it scrutinised by the Attorney-General's Chambers and submitted to the Agong for endorsement.

"(The EC) can start doing it tomorrow," he added.

Currently, absentee voters can only register with the EC in their respective constituencies after nomination day before receiving ballots in the mail later.

Five-year rule

Describing the current system as a form of "logistical bureaucracy", Loke said the ballot will become meaningless should it reach Malaysia after the election is concluded.

He proposed the the EC have a centralised system in which Malaysian embassies register voters, manage the distribution of the ballots to voters and return of the ballots to Malaysia.

"All these must come in a package with longer period of campaigning, which was why Bersih asks for 21 days for campaign," he said.

Meanwhile, Hatta criticised the EC for imposing a condition for voters residing overseas, requiring them to return once every five years to qualify to vote.

Yesterday, EC chief Abdul Aziz Yusof said this was necessary to ensure that Malaysians voting from overseas understand the local political scenerio.

Hatta said Pakatan members of the PSC had opposed this.

"With the advancement of technology, many (Malaysians living abroad) actually know more about Malaysia compared to certain Malaysians here," he said.

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