

**'Shanghaied' voters cry foul at EC**  
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**Oleh Kuek Ser Kuang Keng**

Despite repeated calls from the Election Commission (EC) for Malaysians living abroad to register as voters at their respective embassies, Malaysians in Shanghai, China were told by their consulate general that this cannot be done.

Tan Yoke Suan, a member of Shanghai Bersih supporters group, told Malaysiakini that she was initially informed by friends that the consulate general in Shanghai has stopped registering voters since July this year.

She confirmed it herself on Wednesday.

"Currently the consulate general still does not accept the registration of ordinary voters on the grounds that there is no directive from the higher authority," she said when contacted.

This is contrary to the EC's earlier announcement that citizens abroad can register themselves as ordinary voters before the laws are amended which would allow them to be converted to postal voters.

Previously, EC chief Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof (left) expressed disappointment that the response from Malaysians abroad in registering themselves as voters has been poor.

A check with MyOverseasVote (MOV), a group formed by overseas Malaysians to lobby for their voting rights in the next general election, found that Malaysian missions in New York, Berne, Bangkok, London, Dublin and Singapore, among others, provided the registration service.

The EC is currently in the midst of amending the election laws to enable all overseas Malaysians to vote through postal votes, but only those who have already registered as ordinary voters can do so.

According to the EC, those who registered before Dec 31 will be eligible to vote if the 13th general election is called in February or later.

#### Mysterious status change

In addition to not being able to register, several Malaysians in Shanghai also found themselves mysteriously registered as postal voters although they are not qualified.

The present law and the new amendments only allow overseas Malaysians who are full-time students or civil servants and their spouses to register as "absentee voters" who can vote via post.

A 54-year-old Malaysian residing in Shanghai who wished to be known as Winnie, was shocked when she found that she had been registered as postal voter without her knowledge.

"I have registered and voted in the 1980s before I got married and moved to Shanghai with my husband who is a China national.

"I did not vote after that. Recently I was told that overseas Malaysian can vote in the next general election, so I went to the Malaysian consulate general in Shanghai to check and was told I have already registered as a postal voter," she said when contacted.

"I am neither a student nor civil servant, and my husband is a China national - how could I be registered as a postal voter?"

A check on the EC online database confirmed that she is indeed an "absentee voter" who is eligible to vote via post. According to the EC's record, she registered as postal voter on April 22, 2008.

When told about the date of her 'registration', Winnie said she did register at the consulate general in that month but was not aware that she has been categorised as postal voter.

"Now the consulate general said they cannot change my status, and I have to go to the EC office in Malaysia to have my status changed. Why are they causing us so much trouble?" she said.

EC bureaucracy

According to her, the EC had sent a letter to her house in Malaysia requesting her to change her voting status at the EC office if she wants to convert to ordinary voter.

Winnie added that her friend, another Malaysian residing in Shanghai, has also been wrongly registered as postal voter despite not being a student or civil servant.

Tan also claimed that Bersih Shanghai has detected at least four such cases.

"All of them have been asked to submit their personal details to the Shanghai consulate general between 2001 to 2003, and were told that those information would be use to contact and bring them back to Malaysia during emergency and disasters.

"Little did they know they were registered as postal voters. Some of them went back to Malaysia to vote in the 2008 general election, but could not find their names in the ordinary electoral roll.

"Then in May or June this year, the EC sent letters to their addresses in Malaysia asking them to convert to ordinary voters if they have returned to Malaysia," Tan said.

Malaysiakini has informed the EC about the complaints and is awaiting for its response.

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