

Friends in S'pore start own 'return to vote' campaign

MalaysiaKini.com

April 12, 2013

By Koh Jun Lin

Several persons were spotted roving around the Jurong East MRT station in Singapore yesterday carrying placards urging Malaysians to return to their hometowns to vote.

One onlooker took a photograph of the scene and posted it on Facebook, where it went viral with over 1,800 'shares' in just 17 hours.

This turned out to be part of a private initiative of a group of about 20 Malaysian expatriates working or studying on the island nation, whom, despite fears of reprisal from Singaporean authorities, said "it did not feel right" to do nothing ahead of the looming election.

The group's founder, who asked only to be identified as "Ah Yin", said she was inspired by another photograph that went viral on Facebook several days ago, which featured a man wearing Himpunan Hijau's signature green t-shirt (right) and holding a placard urging Malaysian's to return to vote.

"I saw the photo and asked my friends in Singapore, 'Do we want to do this?' and they said 'Why not?' so it accidentally turned into this," she said when contacted by Malaysiakini today.

She said the movement and its 20-odd participants move in small groups of about two or three in order to avoid drawing the attention of Singaporean authorities and their restrictive laws on political expression.

In addition, the campaign's message was limited to urging Malaysians to return to vote instead of anything that may be perceived as more provocative.

Singaporean unhappy

"They (Singaporean government) are afraid that the anti-establishment sentiments would spread there from Malaysia," she claimed, adding that her group would avoid confrontation with the police because they still hope to make a living there.

She said Jurong East MRT station was picked as the venue for the first day of their campaign because it was a major interchange where many Malaysians transit to catch a bus ride across the Johor Straits after work.

Regardless, their campaign did not start smoothly. Within 20 minutes of starting at about 4pm yesterday, a Singaporean angrily confronted her and a friend and told them to take their activism back to Malaysia.

"He told us to leave immediately. We tried to speak to him but he won't listen at all and just

kept scolding and scolding.

“We said to him that we are showing these (placards) to fellow Malaysians and not Singaporeans, but he won’t listen. He told us that we can’t do this in Singapore. Do what? It is not (a serious offence like) murder or arson,” she claimed.

The man even brandished his phone and threatened to call the police, and when she gave up and adjourned to a coffee shop for a drink, the man followed her there and only left some time afterwards.

However, she told Malaysiakini that other batches of the group’s activists who arrived later were able to campaign freely without interference.

She also said that the campaign was her own initiative and is not affiliated to the Jom Balik Undi campaign, which also calls for Malaysian expatriates to cast their votes at home.

The latter campaign also encourages Malaysian expatriates to take photos of themselves posing with a placard urging Malaysians to vote, and then post the photos on Facebook.

Alternate video sympathetic to BN

The two are just several of many separate online initiatives trying to persuade some 700,000 Malaysians abroad to vote on the 13th general election, slated for May 5.

One video posted on YouTube on April 20 drew over 28,000 viewers and over 1,000 ‘Likes’ in two days.

The video, about one minute and 40 seconds long, narrates one undergraduate student’s grievances with the status quo and her determination to do her part to change it.

On the same day, BN supporters edited the video and uploaded an alternate version of it that is sympathetic of the ruling coalition.

Where the narrator of the original version had lamented, “many friends have left the country for better opportunities,” the altered version featured dubbed audio and swapped subtitles that say, “many friends are returning to help the country develop.”

As of writing, the doctored video has some 8,000 views and over 900 ‘Dislikes’.

Meanwhile, Chinese-language daily Nanyang Siang Pau reported yesterday that within a day of the polling date being announced, all bus tickets from Singapore to Ipoh have been sold out.

The article says that its reporters have surveyed three express bus companies, all of which were quoted saying that they have increased the number of trips to Ipoh.

However, the tickets were "selling out faster than Chinese New Year" and they could not cope with demand.

The city of Ipoh is divided between the parliamentary constituencies of Ipoh Timor and Ipoh Barat. Both are Chinese-majority seats with 82 percent and 65 percent of the population being Chinese Malaysians, respectively.

Budget airline AirAsia X is also running a promotional campaign where voters can get cheaper flights home to vote.

Although the Election Commission (EC) has allowed more Malaysia's abroad to cast postal votes, the facility is not extended to Malaysians based in southern Thailand, Singapore, Brunei and Kalimantan.

Some expatriates have also complained that they were unable to register as postal voters because the EC's website was inaccessible, while the EC said there would be no extension of the deadline.

"I advise those who have failed to register before the deadline to look to themselves and ask why it happened that way, and return home to vote," EC chief Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof (above) had said.

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd
Source: <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/226631>