

'NGOs already helping to register voters'
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The Malaysia Election Observation Network has claimed to be way ahead of the Coalition for Free and Fair Election (Bersih), which called on NGOs to conduct voter registration exercises.

NONECoordinator Ong Boon Keong said the network had met with the Election Commission (EC) in Putrajaya on Feb 19 and requested that posts of assistant registrars be opened to NGOs, among other recommendations towards reform.

He blamed the lack of registration forms as holding back the network and other groups like Saya Anak Bangsa Malaysia and peninsula-based youth observers Epic from increasing their involvement.

"We have to get the forms from (political) parties. So the issue is to press the EC to allow NGO representatives to be appointed as assistant registrars," he said, commenting on Bersih's call to NGOs to assist in efforts to register voters.

"We will continue to pressure them because the EC and political parties are slow to register voters. This has caused registration to fall behind the growth of voters over the years. This is why we have 4.3 million unregistered voters in Malaysia."

ncr land sarawak and palm oil plantationOng said the network had begun registering voters in Sarawak's interior last September, when volunteers visited the state to assist potential voters who face travel and financial problems.

He was critical of political parties or their supporters who had not shown much enthusiasm for registering voters three months ago.

"They claimed that, if there is a change (in party allegiance) of 4-5 percent of voters, it would overwrite all voter registration efforts that have been put it," he said.

"This reflects a less than pro-active approach to the enfranchisement of voters, for example, in Sarawak's interior where more than half of the residents are not yet registered.

"They should be registered so that the rule of the popular majority is not compromised by lack of rural votes."

Other proposals

The network's proposals include extending the nomination time from the current one hour to two weeks; to remove the EC from the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister's Department; and to reduce the voter registration period from the current 3-6 months to two weeks.

The network also wants the EC to be empowered to conduct candidate debates; make available postal votes those from Sabah and Sarawak who are working in the peninsula; and set up a complaints handling mechanism online for public monitoring.

Ong said these recommendations, which are based on grassroots experiences and best practices from other Asian countries, are more specific compared to Bersih's "generalist" suggestions.

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