

Automatic Voter Registration; Compulsory Voting; No Party Hopping

MalaysianMirror.com

26 March 2012

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P Ramakrishnan made the following recommendations before the Parliamentary Select Committee on Electoral Reform.

No party-hopping

We do not have an anti-party hopping law. Such a law is necessary so that the voters' mandate is not frustrated and violated.

A successful independent candidate has no obligation to any party and subsequently she can join any party of her choice.

But it is different when it comes to a candidate nominated by a party. He is elected based on the party's stature and manifesto. A candidate after having been elected on a particular party ticket has no right to switch party. It is clearly a blatant betrayal of the voters' mandate. When this takes place, the seat should automatically fall vacant forcing a by-election.

It cannot be argued that a party candidate has the right of association when he switches party after being elected. The argument that it infringes on the right of association does not hold water. An elected member can switch his party affiliation any time he wants – that right is not challenged. But when he betrays the voters and makes a mockery of the democratic process there must be a consequence. He can become a member of any political party he chooses to be but he has no right to cling on to his elected position because he was elected on a different party platform.

An elected representative who switches party should be allowed to contest in the by-election when his seat falls vacant. And if he gets elected once again, then his position is legitimised and he can stay on as an elected representative honourably.

Recommendation

An anti-party hopping law must be enacted to protect the peoples' mandate and sanctify the democratic electoral process.

Automatic registration

Registration of voters should be automatic. All we need is the political will to make this possible. The Election Commission's (EC) computer system should be linked to the National Registration Department (NRD).

All Malaysians are required to renew their ICs on reaching the age of 21. It is at this stage that there should be a link with the NRD so that all Malaysians reaching the age of 21 are automatically registered.

The address on the new IC will determine their constituency for voting purposes. The current practice of submitting forms to the EC to seek registration as a voter is slow, cumbersome and prone to mistakes. Those who don't submit such forms are left out from the electoral roll, thereby forfeiting their right to vote.

All eligible voters will be on the electoral roll when registration is automatic and there will be hardly any mistake with regard to their particulars. By linking the EC's computer system with the NRD, it is possible to be up to date especially when deaths are reported to the NRD. The names of the deceased can be correctly and automatically removed in this way.

Recommendation

The EC's computer system must be linked to the NRD so that all eligible voters are registered.

Compulsory voting

We do not have compulsory voting in Malaysia. Our close neighbour Singapore has made voting compulsory.

Non-notification of change of address can be solved through this system. People seeking jobs or settling elsewhere after their automatic registration must notify their change of address. When voting is made compulsory, those concerned will be forced to be responsible and provide their new address, failing which they will have to travel to their previous address to cast their vote.

The advantages of compulsory registration is that there will be greater participation by Malaysians to make the democratic process meaningful. Greater participation of the majority of the population enhances our democratic process and compels the candidates to address the needs of all rather than confine themselves to certain groups who form the majority in that constituency.

Recommendation

Relevant laws must be amended or introduced to make voting compulsory.

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