

Malaysian voting group welcomes EC's postal vote option

Reuters

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KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 25 — A group representing Malaysians living abroad have welcomed the Election Commission's (EC) announcement that there's a possibility of them voting using postal ballots in the next general election.

EC chairman Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Yusof made the announcement today, adding the commission was also looking at using a controversial biometric system with indelible ink, as proposed by the Bersih 2.0 group seeking free and fair elections.

"For the past year, MyOverseasVote have been lobbying the EC to extend the right to vote by post to all citizens residing overseas, and not just civil servants, servicemen and students

"While we are gratified that our position has, with the help of public pressure and the influence of the global Bersih 2.0 campaign, now been accepted in principle," said the MyOverseasVote group in a statement issued in Australia.

MyOverseasVote said it will continue to monitor the details put forward and seek to work with the EC "to ensure that the right to vote for Malaysian citizens overseas is realised expeditiously and in good time for the next general election, while also ensuring that the electoral system is not thereby opened up to any potential abuse".

It also asked the EC to engage constructively with all political parties and with civil society on several issues such as:

- * Registration of Voters – While responsibility for registering must lie with individual overseas voters, the EC must ensure that Malaysian missions overseas have the knowhow and resources to deal with registrations and enquiries by Malaysians who wish to register to vote. For too long, the EC and Wisma Putra have simply pointed the finger at one another and made excuses for the fact that Malaysian missions have routinely turned away Malaysian citizens who wished to register to vote.

- * Suitability of Voting Mechanism – The current 2003 postal voting regulations provide for postal ballots to be sent directly by constituency returning officers to absent voters by post, and for the ballots to be returned to the constituency returning officers in the same manner. For many parts of the world, this process will take at least three or four weeks. Either the campaigning period must be sufficiently long for postal ballots to be sent and returned in the normal manner, or the EC must consider implementing a system of advanced voting at Malaysian missions overseas.

- * Security of the voting system – Whatever method is selected, it is crucial for public confidence in the electoral system that the EC must ensure that there is no potential for postal ballots to be intercepted, either on the way to or on the way from the voter.

- * Timing of the amendments – We call upon the EC to publish its proposed amendments and to send them for the approval of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong within two months.

"Adequate time must be left for Malaysian citizens to register under the new regulations so they can be registered in good time for the next general election," it said.

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