

**Election Candidates May Be Barred From Withdrawing During Cooling-off Period**  
**Bernama**  
**February 9, 2012**

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 9 (Bernama) -- Individuals confirmed as election candidates may be barred from withdrawing their candidacy during the cooling-off period after nomination.

This was among the new rules expected to be implemented by the Election Commission to ensure only candidates who were serious stood for elections.

"It is one of the proposals that has received the agreement of the EC. Once the cooling-off period (three days from nomination) is done away with, candidates whose nominations are accepted, automatically cannot withdraw their candidacy," Datuk Seri Dr Maximus Ongkili, the chairman of the Parliamentary Select Committee for Electoral Reform, told a press conference after chairing the committee's eleventh meeting at Parliament House here Thursday.

According to him, the EC had also accepted a proposal to do away with the objection period during nomination.

However, to effect the changes, he said amendments to election regulations would have to be done first and these were expected to be settled by early April.

"We hope the changes can be effected in the 13th General Election," he said.

Ongkili said the meeting today was also updated on the use of indelible ink during the voting process, which will be gazetted on Wednesday (Feb 15).

At the same time, the EC is also expected to gazette a new ruling to enable disabled voters to bring along a family member to help them in the balloting process.

On allowing overseas voting for Malaysians, Ongkili, who is also Science, Technology and Innovation Minister, said the matter was still under consultation.

"The EC is still reflecting on sets of conditions for overseas voting. But as for now, they (Malaysians residing overseas) have to come home to vote," he said.

However, he said the EC had trained staff of Malaysian diplomatic missions to facilitate the postal voting process for Malaysians residing abroad who are qualified to vote.

On the proposal to extend early voting to include nurses and doctors, Ongkili based on discussions, the Health Ministry had given its assurance that it would not prevent nurses and doctors, including those on duty, to go out to vote.

"According the ministry, the numbers were small, and as such did not pose a problem (nurses and doctors going out to vote as normal)," he said.

An announcement on extending the category (early voters) would be made by the EC at the committee's next meeting, said Ongkili.

He added that the committee planned to table its final report next month before its mandate ended on April 2.

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Source: <http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v6/newsindex.php?id=644710>