

US gives non-taxpayers the ballot, overseas voting group tells EC
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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 7 — A group representing Malaysian voters living abroad slammed the Election Commission (EC) today for wrongly citing the United States as a country that operates a “no tax, no vote” system.

EC chairman Tan Sri Aziz Yusof was earlier reported as saying that Malaysians overseas would have to pay tax to Putrajaya before being given postal votes, a proposal that garnered support from MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek.

Aziz was chided for his ‘ignorant and misleading assertions about the American system of overseas voting.’ — File pic

However, the election regulator chief clarified yesterday that he only gave the US as an example “where postal voters should be taxpayers” to show that other countries imposed conditions on citizens living abroad before allowing them to vote.

But MyOverseasVote said in a statement that even this assertion was wrong and chided “the EC chairman and the MCA’s ignorant and misleading assertions about the American system of overseas voting.”

In its statement, it pointed to the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act that allows a US citizen abroad the right to vote so long as he is 18 years or older, saying that this fact was confirmed by the US Embassy in London.

“According to the Constitution of the United States of America, it is illegal to link the payment of taxes to the right to vote.

“The 24th Amendment provides that ‘the right of citizens of the United States to vote... shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State by reason of failure to pay any poll tax or other tax’,” the group added.

Electoral reforms movement Bersih 2.0 has also slammed as unconstitutional the suggestion to bar overseas Malaysians who do not pay taxes from voting, pointing out that many Malaysians here are not taxpayers.

It said that those who earn less than RM2,500 a month and many retirees are exempt from paying income tax, and asked if these groups will also be barred from voting in parliamentary and state elections.

The group has persistently demanded the EC to open the way for Malaysians abroad to exercise their constitutional right to vote.

There are an estimated 700,000 Malaysians living and working abroad.

Earlier last month, the High Court here threw out an application by six Malaysians overseas who wanted a review of the election laws.

Judge Datuk Rohana Yusuf had ruled that the applicants "clearly" did not come under the allowed absent voter category. She noted that the Elections (Registration of Electors) Regulations 2002 define "absent voters" as citizens who are members of the armed forces, public servants, full-time students, or their spouses who are allowed to cast postal votes.

The government had set up a parliamentary select committee last year to improve elections after international condemnation of its clampdown on the July 9 Bersih 2.0 rally which saw over 1,500 arrests, scores injured and the death of an ex-soldier.

But opposition leaders, who strongly supported the march, have threatened further protests if electoral reforms including eight key demands by Bersih 2.0 are not implemented before the next general election, widely expected to be called this year, ahead of its 2013 expiry.

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