

First Voting For Malaysians In U.S. Characterized By "Passion And Fervour"
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By Manik Mehta

NEW YORK, April 29 (Bernama) -- Even if the lines of voters were not as long as those witnessed at Malaysia's high commissions in the UK or Australia, the participation by Malaysians Sunday at the first-ever voting at the Malaysian permanent mission in New York was, nevertheless, characterized by "passion and fervour", as many voters were saying.

The list of pre-registered voters with Malaysia's Election Commission for casting ballots in New York was around 150, though earlier some sources had placed the number on the list as "close to 200".

Syed Bakri Syed Abdul Rahman, Malaysia's consul general in New York, personally supervised the voting assisted by the consulate staff.

A team of five neutral observers - all based in the New York/New Jersey region - also watched the proceedings of the voting and spoke to several individual voters to get feedback on their experience of the voting.

Munhoe SzeTho, an investment banker from Kuala Lumpur, now living in Princeton, New Jersey and a 12-year resident in the United States, told Bernama that the entire voting process was "pretty well laid out".

"But this being the first time that voting was held abroad, one could also expect minor technical errors...for example, the official ballot stamps in some cases did not match with the serial numbers.

It is not easy for some Malaysians to meet the requirement of spending 30 days in Malaysia to be able to qualify for voting abroad," said SzeTho, adding that there were no replacements for spoilt ballots.

But SzeTho emphasized that the whole process was "transparent and the observers were generally satisfied with the overall process".

Badrul Ismail of Selangor, a student at the New School of New York, said that he was voting for the second time in his life and the first time abroad.

Describing the voting as "historic" because Malaysians overseas were being allowed to vote for the first time in the history of the nation, he said that the election itself was a "well-hyped competition" between the ruling coalition and the opposition.

He welcomed the facility to vote in New York and called for "further simplification" of the voting process which may have been confusing for some voters.

Badrul said that all Malaysian voters should be conscious of their responsibility to vote. He also appealed to Malaysian politicians to "intensify their contacts with Malaysians abroad".

Natasha Alias, born in Ipoh but raised in Kuala Lumpur, said she was "proud" to cast her ballot for the first time in voting abroad.

Natasha, who has been living in New York for the past three years, has completed her MBA degree from Metropolitan College of New York.

She confirmed that there had been voters who had come from distant states such as Texas, Kentucky and Georgia to cast their ballots in New York.

"I am glad that Malaysia is, finally, providing this facility for its nationals abroad. I discern a lot of passion and commitment on the part of Malaysians to vote. I am glad we are moving a step forward in the sense we are able to have postal voting.

"There are many Malaysians abroad and this is a good way to let Malaysians participate in the voting back home. I wish there were more Malaysians as in the UK and Australia.

"Though some Malaysians told me that the instructions on the voting were confusing for them, I am sure we will definitely improve the voting process by the time we come to the next election," she said.

One of the amazing stories about the extent to which Malaysian voters can go to cast their ballot was exemplified by Jonathan Hwa of Ipoh, who is an exchange student studying finance and psychology at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia.

In an interview with Bernama outside the ad hoc polling station set up at the Malaysian permanent mission, Hwa said that he had taken a bus from Atlanta which took 15 hours before it reached New York.

"I took the bus because flying is much more expensive. I wanted to cast my vote in this election which, in my personal view, is unique and will decide many things on Malaysia's future. I learnt about the voting facility at the Malaysian permanent mission in New York through the social media. I am going to take the 15-hour bus ride back to Atlanta tonight," he said.

Evelyn Lim of Kuala Lumpur, who lives in New York and has been a designer for television and films, praised the "smooth manner" in which the voting process in New York had gone.

She said that the information on the voting process would suffice anyone knowing how to operate a computer.

"Although I had no problem registering online, I heard from others that some persons found the procedural instructions slightly confusing," Lim said.

She said that the first-time voting for Malaysians abroad was a "significant event".

"It is an important milestone in the history of Malaysia, and I am sure the next voting, after five years, will be much better streamlined," she remarked.

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