

Bangladesh denies claims its workers were phantom voters
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By Syed Jaymal Zahiid

KUALA LUMPUR, June 3 — The government of Bangladesh today denied allegations that its Malaysian-based workers had voted as phantom voters in Election 2013, adding that the “xenophobic” accusation has subjected its citizens to abuse.

The country’s High Commissioner to Malaysia Atiqur Rahman also laughed off claims that 40,000 of Bangladeshi citizens had been transported into Malaysia to vote for the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) a week before the May 5 polls.

“It was of great regret for me to notice the efforts of vilifying Bangladeshi citizens by some quarters through their allegations ... of the existence of phantom voters of Bangladeshi origin,” Atiqur told a press conference at the Bangladesh High Commission here.

“I want to further clarify that it is absurd that 40,000 Bangladeshi had come to Malaysia within a week’s time to vote in the 13th general election as claimed by some people”.

Although Atiqur conceded there were Bangladeshis who voted in the May 5 polls, he asserted that the 100 or so who did were likely to be those given Malaysian citizenships after residing in the country for more than 30 years.

Atiqur further noted that laws in both his country and Malaysia prohibit Bangladeshi citizens from voting here, saying this meant it was unlikely that they had participated in Malaysia’s elections.

“Therefore, the propaganda of Bangladeshi citizens voting in the 13th general election, I am sure, is nothing but a mere fabrication by some interest groups and a sheer misrepresentation of facts.

“You will agree that the efforts of political manipulation by depicting Bangladesh nationals as phantom voters might put those innocent Bangladeshis under increased threat and, at the same time, impose a negative image of our country unfairly.

“Such xenophobic propaganda may also put the target group especially Bangladeshi workers in greater risk from physical, mental and involuntary abuse,” he said.

Pakatan Rakyat (PR) leaders have accused the ruling coalition of rigging the Election 2013 results through fraudulent practices that include transporting foreign nationals into key states in Malaysia to vote for Barisan Nasional (BN).

BN leaders have described the allegation as baseless and said the opposition has yet to show any concrete evidence to support its claims.

Despite a resurgent opposition, BN hung on to power by winning 133 seats against PR’s 88, although this was seven fewer than what it garnered in 2008. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak’s coalition also lost the popular vote for the first time since 1969.

PR and electoral reform group Bersih are now planning to file election petitions to challenge some results from the May 5 polls, claiming to have strong evidence of fraud in what had

been Malaysia's closest election to date.

Among the evidence compiled are videos that purportedly show foreign nationals being flown in a day before the election.

Atiqur maintained that the allegations are baseless and urged "sensible Malaysians" to not believe in what he termed "fabricated rumours".

"We are ignoring this propaganda. We also hope that sensible people of Malaysia do not believe such fabricated rumours," he said.

Najib had recently announced that his government would see through its plans to reform the electoral system by placing the Election Commission (EC) under a special parliamentary committee.

PR leaders, however, claimed the move was more of a public relations exercise and called for the resignation of the commission's leadership as the first condition towards genuine polls reform.

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