

All students abroad may vote, says EC

By Melissa Chi

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Wan Ahmad said foreign missions had erred in denying privately-sponsored students the right to cast their ballots. — file pic

PETALING JAYA, Feb 11 — The Election Commission (EC) has instructed the Foreign Ministry to allow all full-time students abroad to vote at overseas missions, said its deputy chairman Datuk Wira Wan Ahmad Wan Omar today.

Wan Ahmad said today that Malaysian embassies and high commissions had not acted legally in only allowing government-sponsored students to vote as there is no law barring privately-sponsored students from registering and casting their votes.

“Under the constitution, we cannot deny the rights to vote by eligible Malaysians. So, our number one focus is our students abroad, no matter whether they are students [sponsored] by the private sectors or government-financed students. We have informed the Malaysian embassies,” he said.

“Under the registration law 2002, it states very clearly full-time students abroad with their spouses, are eligible to register as voters if they have proof that they are full-time students,” Wan Ahmad said, referring to the Elections (Registration of Electors) Regulations, 2002.

“The law does not restrict private students to register as voters. I think the misunderstanding was the part of the Malaysian embassies abroad.

“Last week, we have made the clarification with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that what they have done in the past, by only allowing the government-sponsored students to register, was actually not in line with the law,” he added.

Speaking at the launch of the “Voice Your Choice” campaign by the Growing Emerging Leaders (GEL), a non-governmental organisation (NGO), Wan Ahmad said students could vote after producing proof of enrolment from their universities and registering their current addresses with the mission.

Under election law, only four categories of citizens residing abroad are allowed to cast their votes as “absent voters”, defined in general terms as registered voters living outside Malaysia.

The absent-voter categories include military personnel, public servants, full-time students and their spouses, who may participate in elections by voting at the high commissions or consulates in the countries they live in.

All other citizens living abroad must return to Malaysia if they want to vote whenever an election is called.

Today, Wan Ahmad said the EC has begun placing appointed assistant registrars in all Malaysian embassies, starting January this year.

“Please forgive the past things which have been done without the knowledge of the Election Commission but I can assure you starting from this year, all students abroad, no matter government-sponsored students or if they are private sponsored, are eligible to register at Malaysian embassies anywhere,” he said.

Since Election 2008, which saw the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) government lose its two-thirds majority in Parliament and cede control of five states, Malaysians abroad have been agitating for their right to be registered as absent voters.

MyOverseasVote (MOV), a campaign recently founded in London, is in Malaysia exploring legal avenues to rectify what it describes as constitutional defects, to provide for the legitimate voting rights to all Malaysians living overseas, without any form of discrimination.

Wan Ahmad also said the EC was now looking at extending the ballot to other Malaysians at large who were working in international organisations or running businesses overseas.

“That will come later because ... it is a very complicated process. The election of our country is based on a territorial constituency representation,” Wan Ahmad explained.



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