

Joint MHA-ELD Statement on takedown of foreign online election advertising

We have identified a number of foreigners attempting to influence this GE.

Foreigners must not direct, fund or in any way influence Singapore's elections. It is an offence under the Parliamentary Elections Act (PEA) for foreigners to participate in elections activity or publish online election advertising (OEA).¹ Singapore's politics must be for Singaporeans alone to decide.

[1] Under the PEA, OEA is defined as any material which is published online that can reasonably be regarded as intended to promote or prejudice the electoral success or standing of a political party or candidate.

The Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA), as the Assistant Returning Officer, has issued Corrective Directions under Section 61N of the PEA to Meta, to disable Singapore users' access to several OEA published on Facebook by foreigners during the election period. Specifically, these are the following posts by:

- Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS)'s National Treasurer Iskandar Abdul Samad, who expressed support for a candidate in the GE.
- Facebook user "Zai Nal", identified to be Zulfikar bin Mohamad Shariff, an Australian Citizen who renounced his Singapore Citizenship in 2020. In his post, he accused several Malay-Muslim Members of Parliament of failing to represent the interests of the Muslim community, and said that the local Muslim community did not need another Malay MP who did not represent their views.
- PAS Selangor Youth Chief Mohamed Sukri Omar, who reposted Zulfikar's post.

Zulfikar was previously detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA) in 2016 for his active promotion of terrorism and glorification of the terrorist group Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) online. His actions had contributed to the radicalisation of at least two other Singaporeans. He had also called on Muslims to reject the constitutional, secular, democratic state in favour of an Islamic state governed by Syariah law. He believed that violence should be used to achieve this goal if necessary.

These posts have been targeted at Singaporeans. They interfere with our domestic politics, which are reserved for our citizens. They also urge Singaporeans to vote on racial and religious lines, and have led to more social media postings of a similar nature.

All this has the potential to fracture the multi-racial and multi-religious harmony that is the bedrock of our nation.

We must not mix religion and politics. Singapore is a secular state. Our institutions serve all Singaporeans equally. Bringing religion into politics will undermine social cohesion and harmony, as we have seen in other countries with race- or religion-based politics.

We recognise that public policy may sometimes involve matters of religious concern. The Government will continue to engage widely, including with religious groups, to hear their views and ensure that they are taken into account.

We urge all political parties and their candidates, as well as religious organisations, leaders and members of the public to do our part to safeguard the precious harmony we have in Singapore today.