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Expats get voting right, but for next polls

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ISLAMABAD: In a belated action, President Asif Ali Zardari Thursday signed the "Electoral Laws (Amendment) Ordinance, 2013" to facilitate the overseas Pakistanis to cast their vote from abroad, but it will not change the ground reality and the overseas Pakistanis will not be able to exercise their right due to other legal hitches.

The ordinance provides that the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) at least 14 days before the day fixed for poll abroad, shall establish polling stations with as many polling booths as may be necessary in the premises of

an Embassy, a Mission or a Consulate provided that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have obtained consent of the host countries for establishment of the polling stations. The Ordinance further says that an overseas Pakistani not later than ten days before the day fixed for poll abroad, register himself as an elector in the embassy, mission or consulate where he intends to cast his vote. With polling day fixed for tomorrow (Saturday), the ECP would be unable to make arrangements in this regard and subsequently the overseas Pakistanis would not be able to cast their votes in Saturday's elections.

The President approved and signed the

Ordinance on the advice of caretaker Prime Minister Hazar Khan Khoso.

According to Spokesperson to the President, Senator Farhatullah Babar the Ordinance provides that the ECP at least 14 days before the day fixed for poll abroad, shall establish polling stations with as many polling booths as may be necessary in the premises of an Embassy, a Mission or a Consulate provided that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have obtained consent of the host countries for establishment of the polling stations.

An overseas Pakistani not later than ten days before the day fixed for poll abroad, register

himself as an elector in the embassy, mission or consulate where he intends to cast his vote. To ensure the conduct of free, fair and transparent poll, the ECP shall appoint as many independent monitors as necessary at a polling station abroad, the Ordinance says. The Ordinance shall come into force at once but shall take effect on the date to be notified by the ECP in the official gazette.

Commenting on the issue, former ECP head Kanwar Dilshad was of the view that it seemed impossible to make arrangements in just one day. "Any effort in haste could lead to complication, so ECP should make a strategy keeping in view of the ordinance."