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Sarawak-Kit Siang

RO'S SHOULD BE FROM OUTSIDE OF CONSTITUENCIES: DAP CHIEF

KUCHING, Sept 1 (Bernama) -- DAP Secretary-General Lim Kit Siang, describing the rejection of nomination papers in elections due to minor technical hitches as a flagrant denial of the people's democratic right to vote, today called on the Election Commission to appoint Returning Officers (RO's) from outside of the constituencies to ensure a fair nomination process.

He said the present practice of the commission to appoint mostly the District Officer working in a particular constituency to be the RO should be reviewed because he "tend to be bias to the candidate from the ruling party, especially if the candidate is a minister".

"The attitude among RO's of being very bureaucratic and inflexible over very minor technical hitches in nomination papers also makes a mockery of democracy because it denies the people's right to vote," he told a news conference at the Kuching International Airport on arrival from Kuala Lumpur.

Citing an example, he said the rejection of the nomination papers of DAP's Chiu Chin Sing for the Kemena constituency in Bintulu on nomination day by RO Wilfred Jolly, due to the use of a postal address which falls outside of the constituency, was "unfair and undemocratic".

He said government leaders always appealed to the people to exercise their right to vote every five years but denying this right on flimsy technical ground due to the bias attitude of RO's would make a mockery of this important democratic right of Malaysians.

Lim claimed that Jolly, who is also Bintulu District Officer, was too attached to the Barisan Nasional candidate Datuk Celestine Ujang, who won the seat after Chiu's nomination papers were rejected.

"Jolly showed his biasness because Celestine Ujang is State Minister of Land Develolment and has been the state assemblyman for Kemena for five terms. As the District Officer, he is naturally obligated to ministers," he added.

Lim, who said earlier this week that the DAP would file an election petition against Chiu's disqualification, said democratic practices in the country would be better served if RO's helped facilitate the process of nominations for candidates instead of "finding traps to disqualify them".

According to Lim, Chiu was the DAP's best bet to make a breakthrough in the Sarawak Legislative Assembly because he was very popular in Bintulu and dubbed the giant-killer in last year's parliamentary election when he defeated SNAP president Datuk Amar James Wong for the Bukit Mas constituency.

On Ujang's claim that Chiu would have lost his deposit even if he had been allowed to contest, Lim said if this was so, Ujang should not have raised objections over Chiu's nomination papers on such a minor technical hitch and let the election to proceed in Kemena.

"I now call on Ujang to resign his seat and let the voters of the constituency to decide," he said.

Lim said DAP had also obtained information that some "unhealthy" tactics were used in several other constituencies on nomination day "to prevent opposition and independent candidates to file their papers".

"We know what is happening and this is all the more reason why the voters of Sarawak should elect some opposition candidates to check the arrogance of power that is prevailing in Sarawak," he claimed.

Lim welcomed a remark made by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in his National Day message yesterday that the presence of the opposition in Parliament and state assemblies showed that democracy was functioning in Malaysia.

"But in Sarawak, the trends are unhealthy and not in line with the PM's sentiment because the arrogance of power is so obvious," he said. --

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