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LEAD Boycott-Newspapers

SUPP BOYCOTTS THREE SARAWAK NEWSPAPERS OVER 'BIASED' REPORTING

KUCHING, Sept 20 (Bernama) -- The Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP), a member of the state Barisan Nasional (BN), today announced an immediate boycott of three newspapers published by the Sibu-based See Hua group for alleged biased reporting.

The papers are the English-language Borneo Post and Chinese-language See Hua Daily News and Sinhua Evening News.

SUPP secretary-general Datuk Dr George Chan said the boycott would include barring representatives of the three newspapers from SUPP functions and cancelling all subscriptions to them.

He said the party would also not place any further advertisements in the papers and boycott activities sponsored by them.

"We will also take any other action as may be directed by the (party) Central Working Committee," he told reporters after a two-hour meeting of the Central Committee at SUPP headquarters here.

Several reporters of the See Hua group of newspapers were present at the news conference.

Asked whether the other state BN component parties would support the SUPP boycott, Chan said: "I suppose so."

According to him, the other parties -- Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB), Sarawak National Party (Snap) and Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak (PBDS) -- have echoed their support for the action taken by SUPP against the newspapers.

Present at the SUPP Central Committee meeting were PBB vice president Datuk Adenan Satem, Snap vice president William Mawan and PBDS secretary-general Dublin Unting.

SUPP, the oldest political party in Sarawak, suffered setbacks in the Sept 7-8 state election.

Besides being defeated in four of the 17 constituencies it contested, the party chairman Tan Sri Dr Wong Soon Kai also lost in his Bukit Assek stronghold in Sibu.

Chan, who took over from Dr Wong as Deputy Chief Minister in the new state Cabinet, said SUPP would not tolerate any more irresponsible and biased reporting that could tarnish the party's image and integrity.

He said the boycott would be reconsidered depending on the policy of the three newspapers towards SUPP.

The newspapers must show their sincerity before any effort at reconciliation could be considered.

Meanwhile, the newspapers' managing director Lau Hui Siong has expressed regret over the boycott.

Lau described the boycott as an unjust way of blaming the newspaper group for the defeat of certain candidates in the state election.

"As for the accusation that we are an opposition newspaper group, we shall allow our readers to judge on the matter. Our conscience is clear," he said in a statement.

Lau said even though SUPP has banned them from the party's functions, they would continue to file stories on it "by obtaining information through other means" since they believed in fair coverage for all parties regardless of their political persuasions.

"We shall continue to be receptive to suggestions and different opinions to create a progressive and knowledgeable society as envisioned by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad," he added. -- BERNAMA

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