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Mong may be given another shot at seat

KUCHING, Fri. - Mong Anak Dagang is most likely to be given another shot at the Bukit Begunan seat following the Election Court's ruling yesterday that his victory in last year's State elections is invalid.

Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak vice-president Dr James Masing said the party's supreme council would meet on Sunday to decide on the candidate.

"We will most likely nominate Mong again to contest," Dr Masing said.

"After all, he was the one who had garnered the most number of votes compared to other PBDS candidates who contested in the constituency in past elections.

"Given this scenario, Mong has a better chance of retaining the seat. Since last year's election, he has proven to be capable of developing the constituency," Dr Masing said.

Dr Masing, who is also the State Minister of Tourism, said PBDS would submit Mong's name to Chief Minister and State Barisan Nasional chairman Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud for approval.

Yesterday, the Election Court declared the election for the Bukit Begunan State constituency in the Sept 8 and 9 State elections as null and void as money was used to influence voters.

Judge Ian H.C. Chin said he was convinced beyond reasonable doubt that a sizeable number of people had been bribed during the election for the seat.

In the election, Mong Dagang who contested under the Sarawak BN ticket beat Independent Donald Lawan by 2,165 votes when he polled 4,891 votes.

Donald secured 2,726 votes. The constituency then had 10,926 voters. In the petition, Donald had asked the court to declare the result of the election null and void on two grounds.

Firstly, that there was bribery in the form of vote-buying and secondly, there was excessive spending by his opponent.

In Penang, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim when asked to comment, said the Barisan Nasional would abide by the court ruling and would be making preparations for a by-election.

"It will be up to the Sarawak BN to decide on the candidate and present the name to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad," he told reporters after attending Friday prayers at the Tanjung Tokong mosque.

Meanwhile, at a Press conference today, Donald urged "those who held grudges against me not to capitalise on the outcome of the court decision".

"I wish to make it very clear that I view the outcome of the court decision as nothing personal or partisan as I have made it known when the election petition was filed that it was solely to highlight the prevalence of money politics in the constituency and the danger it posed to our democratic system."

"I have to call this Press conference to prevent those with personal grudges against me from capitalising on the outcome of the court decision and deliberately misinterpreting my intentions," he said.

Donald said his election manifesto in the last State elections was clearly against financial manipulation of voters.

"But unfortunately, my intention was deliberately misinterpreted by these political opportunists for their own personal gains," he added.

Meanwhile, the DAP in a statement has urged the Government to amend the Election Offences Act 1954.

"We want provisions for appeal to higher courts included in the Act, like in other civil or criminal cases," its national publicity secretary and Federal Territory deputy chairman Wee Choo Keong said. He added that the Act was last revised in 1969.

Wee said the amendment should be made to include a provision for appeal within the judicial system so that any error by a single Election Judge could be corrected by the Court of Appeal or Federal Court like in other civil or criminal cases.

"We are glad to note that the judge did not declare the losing candidate as the duly elected people's representative for Bukit Begunan, as was done by an Election Judge in Kuala Lumpur in 1995 involving the Bukit Bintang Parliamentary constituency," he said.

Wee added while the DAP welcomed the decision of the court, it was concerned that there was no provision for appeal in the existing Election laws.

Aliran, in a statement, welcomed the court ruling and urged the Election Commission to investigate vote-buying and other unethical campaign practices.

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