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Chong: Yong eligible to contest

KOTA KINABALU, Tues. - Chief Minister and State Barisan Nasional chairman Datuk Chong Kah Kiat said that Datuk Yong Teck Lee is "perfectly eligible" to re-contest the Likas seat he won in the 1999 State general election.

He dismissed any doubt to the question of Yong's eligibility to re-contest although his application on the Election Court decision has yet to be heard by the Court of Appeal.

"We feel strongly that he is perfectly eligible ... have no doubt about his eligibility (to re-contest)," Chong told a Press conference after chairing a State BN meeting at its headquarters in Putatan Square here.

Yong, who is Sabah Progressive Party president, is the Barisan Nasional candidate for the July 21 Likas State by-election.

He said Yong is the BN's choice to re-contest on the basis of the stay of execution of the judgment in the Likas election petition filed by Parti Bersekutu candidate Datuk Harris Salleh pending an application to the Court of Appeal.

Yong was also granted an application to stay all proceedings under and/or pursuant to the Certificate (on the vacancy of the Likas State seat) issued on June 21 by Election Court Judge Datuk Muhammad Kamil Awang and his report under the Election Offences Act 1954.

The Election Court had on June 8 declared the 1999 State election results for the Likas constituency as null and void.

Chong said the stay of execution was very clear and the question of any doubt did not arise.

Asked about the implication of picking Yong as the BN candidate when his application has yet to be heard by the Court of Appeal, he said the outcome of the appeal did not matter too much to the BN.

"I am just waiting for it (the application) to be heard, I believe great injustice (in the ruling by Judge Datuk Muhammad Kamil Awang) had been done to him (Yong)," he said.

Chong also said that he was hoping the Court of Appeal will "give back justice to where it should be because if you read the (Election Court) judgment it was so prejudiced".

"If he (Yong) is not given the opportunity to stand and if the outcome of the appeal is in his favour we will be doing even greater injustice to him," Chong said.

Asked what action the BN will take if the appeal was not in favour of Yong, he said: "We will argue about it when it comes."

On the Election Commission's non-committal stance on the question of Yong's eligibility to re-contest, he said the BN was ready to answer whatever objection was raised on nomination day.

Asked if the BN would be fielding an alternative candidate in case Yong's nomination was rejected, Chong said the BN had decided on Yong and its stand on the matter was very clear.

Chong said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is BN chairman, had agreed on Yong's candidacy.

All the State BN component parties, he said were unanimous in their support for Yong's candidacy.

Besides Yong, Umno and MCA have also registered interest in contesting the seat.

"After deliberating and considering all aspects, we feel that Yong is the best candidate," Chong said, adding that Yong had served the Likas

constituency very well since his first election in 1995.

Meanwhile, Yong thanked the Barisan Nasional for giving him the mandate to contest the Likas seat in the July 21 by-election.

Yong, optimistic of victory, said he was grateful at being given a chance to continue serving the people of Likas.

He said those who had filed applications in the courts to prevent him from re-contesting should instead allow the Likas people to decide "now that all the legal hurdles were over".

"All the political parties and politically inclined personalities (who wanted to prevent Yong from re-contesting) should now go on to the Likas battle ground and let the people of Likas decide," Yong said.

He described as a "compliment" to him the move by certain parties and lawyers to stop him from contesting by filing applications in the High Court and in the Court of Appeal. "For them to try so hard to prevent me from contesting... I feel complimented," he said.

Yong won the Likas seat in the 1999 State election with a majority of 4,962, defeating five other candidates.

Yong polled 9,110 votes against his nearest rival, Dr Chong Eng Leong of Parti Bersatu Sabah who garnered 4,148 votes.

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