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EC: It's crude and callous (HL)

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ALOR STAR, Tues. - The Election Commission has described the campaigning in Pendang and Anak Bukit as "crude and callous", saying that this should no longer be happening in this country after all these years.

Commission secretary Datuk Wan Ahmad Wan Omar, in expressing his disappointment today, said party workers of both camps should "learn from past elections and abide by campaign ethics".

"We have held 10 general elections and more than 350 by-elections and yet such things are still happening," he lamented.

Wan Ahmad said the election machinery comprised seasoned campaign workers who were aware of what they could or could not do.

Therefore, they should not be resorting to dirty tactics.

He said there were cases of posters being removed and supporters of opposing camps hindering each other from carrying out campaign activities.

"This means that some have failed to learn from past experience; it is also a reflection of their political immaturity."

In anticipation of rising tensions as campaigning becomes more aggressive, Wan Ahmad reminded campaigners to adhere to the commission's code of ethics and guidelines.

Although election campaigns are normally intense, observers here described the Pendang and Anak Bukit campaigns as excessively hostile.

The Pendang parliamentary and Anak Bukit State by-elections were called following the death of Pas president Datuk Fadzil Noor on June 23.

Polling is on Thursday. So far, there have been several reports of assaults on BN campaign workers by Pas supporters, although Parti Keadilan Nasional has claimed to have been treated just as roughly by BN supporters.

Pas has distributed posters of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as a Catholic priest and of his deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, as a pork seller.

Dr Mahathir described this tactic by Pas as an act strictly forbidden by Islam.

DAP life adviser Dr Chen Man Hin lambasted Pas for its "twisted mentality".

On the ground, Pas supporters have been accused of intimidating and harassing Umno campaigners, notably Wanita and Puteri Umno members who have been called jalang or sundal (women of loose morals and prostitutes.)

Wan Ahmad said although there were still many who were sensible, there were some who lacked discipline. However, he said, the police were prepared to handle all cases brought to them.

"The commission is generally quite happy with the police who have kept public order and safety since nomination day."

Wan Ahmad said the police had been requested to inform the commission of all reports lodged during the by-election period so that the commission could, in turn, warn the political parties involved to observe the election rules.