

'Anti-hopping law not due to fear of losing reps after GE13'

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By Susan Loone

Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng has denied that the Penang government's rush to table an anti-hopping law in the state legislative assembly sitting in November is motivated by fear that Pakatan Rakyat could lose elected representatives following the 13th general election.

He said this when asked to respond to criticism by various quarters that the move to curb elected representatives from switching political allegiance mid-term was made because Pakatan has got whiff of its representatives either threatening or showing signs of defecting to rival parties after the next general election, which is expected to be held this year.

Many have also questioned if the move was merely a way for DAP - which dominates the state government - to score "brownie points" as Lim's government is aware that the Federal Court had already ruled any such amendments to be "ultra vires" or unconstitutional as it contradicts with the article on freedom of association in the federal constitution.

So, why table the law when the Penang government is almost certain it would be rejected?

To this, Lim replied, "then let (Barisan National) BN do it. Why don't they want to earn brownie points as well if there are such points to be earned? Instead you see us getting hammered every other day (for wanting to amend the law)".

Shedding old, bad ways

"I am not only talking about reports only but also commentaries which attack us for proposing the amendments. Even so, I believe we should continue to push the boundaries," added Lim in a press conference yesterday.

"This amendment would cuts both ways. When we propose such a law, it also stops people from joining us, to strengthen our position. But what is most important is that we respect the people's wishes, that the people are boss," he stressed.

Lim, who is DAP secretary general, said it was time for Penangites to move into the modern age of democracy and accountability, by shedding "old and bad ways".

Hopping from party to party for personal interest is unacceptable, he said, adding that those who did so need to seek a fresh mandate from their voters, and be allowed to re-contest in the by-election.

"But some politicians are genuine. They want to resign but cannot re-contest. So we want to provide them an avenue. We want the state assembly to declare the seat vacant," said the Bagan member of parliament (MP).

What about independents?

Lim was speaking at a briefing session after a formal discussion with all the state excos, MPs and assemblyperson.

While the 11 Umno assemblyperson have been invited for the session, Lim informed none have turned up, while on Pakatan's side seven elected representatives were absent with apologies.

A legal committee comprising DAP lawyers – Dato Keramat assemblyperson Jagdeep Singh Deo , PAS' Hanipa Mydin and PKR's Balik Pulau MP Yusmadi Yusoff - would see to the drafting of the amendment.

Currently the law states that those who are bankrupt, are of unsound mind, have been charged for an offence and fined not less than RM2,000, and those who have been stripped of their citizenship would be disqualified as elected representatives.

Meanwhile, on the question of whether the amendments would apply to independent candidates, Lim said since they are not members of a certain party, they may not be subjected to the same rules.

However, when told that their voters may wish to see their elected representatives continue as independents, Lim said "let the state exco decide. We should respect their independent stance but I am open to changes".

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