

Kit Siang: Make opposition leader equal to a minister

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By Nigel Aw

DAP has urged that sweeping parliamentary reforms be put at the top of the agenda following the 13th general election, including making the position of opposition leader equal to that of a minister in the cabinet.

"The parliamentary opposition leader should be provided with adequate staff to carry out his duties - at least two political secretaries, one private secretary and three search assistants," said DAP supremo Lim Kit Siang at a press conference in Kuala Lumpur this afternoon.

He added that the opposition leader should also enjoy the same perks and privileges accorded to a minister, on top of being consulted in the arrangement of parliamentary businesses.

"The elevation of the position and status of the parliamentary opposition leader is in keeping with those of a normal democratic country, where alternation of power in every general election is taken as a routine exercise of the democratic rights of voters and not as a national catastrophe..." he said.

Similarly, he said all MPs should also be provided with research assistants and constituency officers so that MPs can discharge their duties professionally.

"There should also be an immediate end to the politics of discrimination against opposition MPs, who are denied the annual RM500,000 (which was) later raised to RM1 million development funds allocated to BN MPs for their constituencies," he said.

'DAP reiterates backing for Anwar'

Lim also reiterated DAP's support for PKR supremo Anwar Ibrahim to be made opposition leader even though DAP is now the largest opposition party with 38 parliamentary seats compared to PKR's 30 and PAS' 21.

Other reforms DAP is urging include:

Ministers must be personally present in Parliament to answer questions;

Establishment of specialist committees to allow for more say in the

decision-making process; and

Live-telecast of full proceedings.

Most importantly, Lim said the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) should be led by a member of the opposition as is the norm in the UK House of Commons for the last 138 years.

"The PAC plays a very important role as a check-and-balance on government financial abuses, excesses and malpractices and its annual report should be an important event which all Malaysians look forward to...

"In Malaysia, nobody has been bothered about the PAC reports - because without an opposition to head it, the PAC cannot play its full and real role as the highest custodian of government public accountability.

"One of the greatest challenges of the 13th Parliament is how the PAC can be restored to its full role as the highest custodian of government public accountability, and not continue to be toothless, obsolete and ineffective, producing outdated reports which interest nobody," he said.

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