

'Elections as political strategy must be encouraged'

MalaysiaKini.com

Feb 1, 2014

The use of elections to obtain political advantage "strengthens electoral democracy" and elections should therefore be "nurtured and encouraged", PKR vice-president N Surendran said today in response to criticisms of PKR's 'Kajang move'.

The Padang Serai MP said that it is the right of the political party to go back to the people as part of a political strategy, be it through a by-election or a national election.

"Much of the criticism has been knee-jerk, poorly reasoned and displays a lack of understanding of party and electoral politics," Surendran said in a statement today.

Anwar's announcement last Tuesday that he will contest the Kajang by-election, a day after the incumbent assemblyperson Lee Chin Cheh resigned, has drawn plenty of flak from both the civil society and political opponents, who have expressed their displeasure with a by-election being called for political strategy reasons.

"A by-election is a superb way for the people to have their say; every properly conducted by-election strengthens democracy, and is an affirmation of participatory democracy," he said.

"The critics of the 'Kajang move' fail to perceive that a modern democracy cannot effectively function without the crowding and jostling of political parties seeking electoral and political advantage. This political advantage can be sought through every legitimate and permitted method, including by-elections," he added.

'Article 51 permits by-elections as a political strategy'

Surendran, a lawyer, said Article 51 of the Federal Constitution is worded in order to permit by-elections as a political strategy, and that it allows for a representative to resign without conditions or qualifications.

"Forcing by-elections as political strategy is practised in many mature democracies. In 2008, MP David Davis resigned from the House of Commons (in the United Kingdom) to force a by-election in order to focus attention on civil liberties. And in 1986, all Unionist MPs resigned from the UK parliament as a political strategy," Surendran said.

“Contrary to what the critics say, there is nothing underhand or dirty in forcing a by-election as a political strategy. Those who lament over the costs of the by-election fail to understand that there are unavoidable costs inherent in a functioning democracy. Their focus should be on clean elections, and not a cheap democracy,” he said.

A by-election is not against the interest of the rakyat, it is instead for the “best possible” thing for the rakyat, Surendran added.

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