

**Many In Sabah, Sarawak Prefer 13th GE After Kaamatan, Gawai
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By Alan Ting**

KUALA LUMPUR, March 20 (Bernama) -- Several community leaders and politicians in Sabah and Sarawak prefer the 13th general election to be held only after the Kaamatan and Gawai festivals, which fall respectively on May 30-31 and June 1 every year.

Dewan Rakyat Deputy Speaker Datuk Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar, for instance, said it would be unwise to hold the election during such festivities.

"If Sarawak is seen as a Barisan Nasional (BN) fixed deposit, don't hold the election during that time as the electors might not be able to cast their votes.

"June 3 as the polling date, as speculated in a news report will be a no-no for Sabah and Sarawak," Wan Junaidi, who is from Sarawak, told Bernama when contacted.

Gawai is celebrated in Sarawak while Kaamatan, in Sabah and Labuan. The two states and the federal territory have a combined total of 57 parliamentary seats.

In Sarawak, the coming general election will only involve 31 parliamentary seats as the state has held its state election on April 16 last year.

In Sabah, the polls involve both the parliamentary and state seats, which are 25 and 60 respectively. Labuan only has a single parliamentary constituency.

Sarawak Dayak Graduates Association President Dr Dusit Jaul said even though parliament dissolution is the discretion of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong upon the advice of the prime minister, he nevertheless hope that the polling date would not fall on the last week of May and first week of June as this would affect those who celebrate the festivals.

"There is a need to take into consideration those who are preparing for Gawai.

"Not only that, if it is held during this festival period, the government risks being perceived as insensitive to the Dayaks. This will not be good for government," he said when contacted.

A local Iban leader from Sibuan, Temenggong Adrian Ringgau pointed out that most Dayaks, especially in longhouses, would also hold ceremonies like weddings and "Gawai Antu" (a festival for the departed souls) in conjunction with the celebration.

"The turnout among Dayak voters can be less than expected if the poll date clashes with the Gawai celebration," he said, adding the election should be held by early May or after mid-June.

Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party (SPDP) president Tan Sri William Mawan also said the election should not be called during the Gawai, a harvest festival celebrated by the Dayaks, which involves family get-together.

During the Gawai, Dayaks in cities and towns will return to their longhouses and villages in a "balik kampung" journey to celebrate the occasion.

Mawan who is Social Development Minister said if the general election is held on that date, it is also likely that the returning members of the community would wield their influence on the longhouse and village folks with their views of the local issues.

Sabah's Upko Secretary-general Datuk Wilfred Madius Tangau said the timing of the two festive seasons should be taken into consideration in deciding the polls' date.

"The month of May might not be suitable, especially in Sabah as Kaamatan Festival is on May 30 and 31. It is a state level celebration. Not appropriate for the election to be held at this period," he said when contacted.

Parti Rakyat Sarawak (PRS) president Tan Sri Dr James Masing said he did not think, however, that holding an election during the Gawai period would affect the celebration mood.

"The election has to be very soon. A lot of things which Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and the government have done, such as the BR1M (1Malaysia People's Aid) distribution and pay rise for civil servants.

"If the election is held much later, the impact will no longer be there," he said, adding that the BR1M effect "has a lifespan of three months."

"After that, it runs out. Anytime during the next three months will be a good date for the election," he said.

Masing, who is Land Development Minister and an anthropologist, said from the social point of view, holding an election during the Gawai celebration was alright as the voting would be just for one day.

Another Deputy Speaker of the Dewan Rakyat, Datuk Ronald Kiandee, who is from Sabah, said there should not be any issue about when the election should be held as he believed that the people were mature enough to understand its importance.

"It's up to the prime minister when to call the election. If you are saying the election should not be called by end of May or early June, you are putting a condition to the prime minister," he said. "That shouldn't be the case."

Kiandee was confident however that the prime minister would pick the best timing for the election.

Whether it is before or after the Kaamatan and Gawai, as pointed out by Sabah State Assembly Speaker Datuk Seri Salleh Tun Said Keruak, Sabah is ready for the polls anytime.

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