

Learn From Sabah Polls, Not The Right Time To Have GE – Analysts

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By Erda Khursyiah Basir

KUALA LUMPUR (Bernama) – Analysts are urging political parties to take heed of what happened in Sabah during the recent state election before pushing for a snap general election.

There has been a spike in COVID-19 cases following Sabah's 16th state election on Sept 26. In fact, daily new cases reported have hit an all-time high since the outbreak first started in Malaysia early this year.

Yesterday, a whopping 432 new cases were reported, on Sunday (Oct 4) 293, Saturday (Oct 3) 317 and Friday (Oct 2) 287. And, since Sept 20, some 235 new cases reported have a history of travel to Sabah.

Although the sharp hike in cases cannot be entirely attributed to the Sabah polls, politicians should, nevertheless, accord priority to the safety and well-being of the people over their own or their party's interests.



Prof Dr Nik Ahmad Kamal Nik Mahmod. --fotoBERNAMA (2020) ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

International Islamic University Malaysia law lecturer Prof Dr Nik Ahmad Kamal Nik Mahmud urged politicians to be rational and place the welfare of the rakyat above their respective political agenda.

SPEND PRUDENTLY

“It’s very risky to have GE15 (15th general election) anytime soon although guidelines and standard operating procedures for the campaigning and voting processes are already in place.

“Although the Sabah state election was not the sole cause for the resurgence in COVID-19 cases, still it is undeniable that many local transmissions were brought about by those who were involved in the polls,” Nik Ahmad Kamal told Bernama.

He said the high cost of holding a general election must also be taken into consideration, more so now when many people are reeling from the effects of the economic slowdown due to the pandemic.

“The financial woes resulting from the pandemic call for more prudent spending. The government must use its allocations to boost domestic economic activities and take care of the people’s welfare,” he added.



Prof Dr Ahmad Martadha Mohamed. --fotoBERNAMA (2020) ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Head of Universiti Utara Malaysia's Governance and Integrity Cluster Prof Dr Ahmad Martadha Mohamed said with the new wave of COVID-19 cases sweeping over the country, Malaysia is not ready to face GE15.

If a general election is called at such a critical time, it will be difficult for party leaders and workers to practice physical distancing when they go campaigning in every nook and cranny of the country.

"During campaign activities, it's hard to avoid close contact with others, which will expose people to the risk of getting infected by the virus," he said.



Voters waiting for their turn to cast their votes at a polling station during the recent state election in Sabah. -- fotoBERNAMA (2020) ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

He said a few lessons can be learned from the Sabah state election where there were cases of COVID-19 infections among those who were involved in the campaigning.

"The people around them, as well as their family members, were also affected. There were also cases of people who, after the election, did not quarantine themselves for selfish reasons," he said, adding that it is best to defer GE15 until the pandemic is well under control.

AVERT ANY POLITICAL CRISIS



The Yang di-Pertuan Agong delivering his Royal address during the opening of the third term of Parliament on May 18. --fotoBERNAMA (2020) ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Nik Ahmad Kamal, meanwhile, said the question of when to hold GE15 will not arise as long as Parliament is not dissolved.

However, he explained, should Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin lose the support of the majority of MPs in the Dewan Rakyat and he seeks an audience with Yang di-Pertuan Agong Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah to request for a dissolution of Parliament, the King has the discretion to dissolve Parliament or not to do so.

If the King consents to the dissolution, then a general election has to be held within 60 days of the date of dissolution, in accordance with Article 55 of the Federal Constitution.

“The only way to avoid snap polls is by averting a political crisis because the latter can lead to the dissolution of Parliament. All political parties and their members must take into consideration the consequences of having a general election during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Nik Ahmad Kamal.

Appealing to political party leaders to be more mature, he added: “Before unleashing any agenda that can lead to the dissolution of Parliament, think more deeply for the sake of the people and the nation, more so now when our country is focusing on fighting the pandemic.”

Translated by Rema Nambiar

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