

PM calls on EC to tighten SOP during Batu Sapi by-election

13 Oct 2020

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 13 -- Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin today called on the Election Commission (EC) to tighten the existing standard operating procedure (SOP) during the by-election for the Batu Sapi parliamentary seat in Sabah, which has been set on Dec 5, to curb the spread of COVID-19.

He said taking into consideration the SOP violations reported during the recently-concluded Sabah state election, the SOP needed to be improved.

“Maybe the EC should take into consideration the lessons from the Sabah state election. Although the SOP had been set, it was not fully complied with...I’m not telling them what to do, it’s just that I think it should be tightened.

“For example, the campaign period need not be 14 days. A shorter period will do and will save cost. Fewer people will come out to campaign. The house-to-house campaign carried out during the state election was among the reasons for the spread of the disease. If possible, just do away with it. That’s my opinion,” he said.

The Prime Minister said when asked whether or not the Batu Sapi by-election should be postponed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in a special press conference at his residence in Putrajaya today.

Earlier today, EC chairman Datuk Abdul Ghani Salleh announced that the polling for the Batu Sapi by-election has been set on Dec 5, while nomination on Nov 23 and early voting on Dec 1.

Meanwhile, Muhyiddin also proposed to the EC to ban any campaign in the form of mass gathering and to carry out enforcement to prevent SOP violations.

Those who breached the SOP should be slapped with compound fines immediately, he said.

“We have to encourage the campaign through social media or the print media, as well as radio and television. This is among the format practised in developed countries to save time and cost, and it is also effective.

“On the polling day, let’s not set shorter timeframes which will make it difficult for the voters to cast their votes. Maybe the number of voting channels and EC workers should be increased so that the polling centres will not be too congested,” he said.

Muhyiddin said those were among the issues that need to be scrutinised by the EC as the by-election must be held as enshrined in the Federal Constitution.

On Perikatan Nasional’s (PN) stand following the decision made by its ally, Barisan Nasional (BN), not to contest in the Batu Sapi by-election, Muhyiddin said the PN would study the matter before issuing any further statement.

“This is because, in our negotiation with Gabungan Rakyat Sabah earlier, some seats including Batu Sapi were allocated to certain parties, so when BN said that they will not contest, then it will be up to the party allocated with the seat to decide,” he said.

The Batu Sapi by-election is being called following the death of its incumbent Datuk Liew Vui Keong of lung infection on Oct 2.

At the 14th General Election, Liew from Parti Warisan Sabah won the seat with 4,619 vote-majority in a four-cornered fight.

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