

Explore alternative voting system, says UMS academician

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Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) academician Dr Romzi Ationg said alternative methods need to be looked into to let people carry out their voting rights especially when travel movement is restricted, and the coronavirus situation is uncertain. - NSTP/File pic

KOTA KINABALU: An ethno-politics expert believes online voting should be explored to allow elections to be carried out during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) academician Dr Romzi Ationg said alternative methods need to be looked into to let people carry out their voting rights especially when travel movement is restricted, and the coronavirus situation is uncertain.

He noted the Election Commission's (EC) standard operating procedures had not been effective to prevent the spread of the infectious virus as many people, including politicians, were seen breaking guidelines during campaigns in previous elections.

"Online voting is fast and requires no personal contact. Such a method also does not necessarily require a significant number of people to go to the ground.

"Exploring alternative voting systems like online polling will portray Malaysia as a country that is really interested in Industry Revolution 4.0 ideas," he said when contacted, today.

Ationg said online voting was nothing new as the method had been used in other developed countries like in the Netherlands and United States.

He also said there were downsides to using online voting system as it is subject to manipulation and requires solid integrity on the part of EC as well as the police.

"In Netherlands, they ended such a move and are now back to using the traditional method of voting due to allegations of fraud. The United States had also used online ballots recently, but similar allegations arose," he said.

Commenting on the declaration of emergency in Batu Sapi, Ationg believes the people in the parliamentary constituency were happy with the development especially when Sabah is still battling the Covid-19 outbreak after the 16th Sabah Election.

Yesterday, Yang di-Pertuan Agong Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah consented the emergency declaration in Batu Sapi as a proactive measure to contain the outbreak, delaying the parliamentary by-election that was set for Dec 5.

The Batu Sapi by-election was necessitated following the death of its incumbent Datuk Liew Vui Keong of Parti Warisan Sabah (Warisan) on Oct 2.

To a question what would happen if a seat was left vacant for a long period of time, Ationg noted nothing significant would occur.

"Leaving both seats vacant for some time shall not bring impact to both federal and state governments. One seat is insignificant to the balance of seats in the Dewan Rakyat or state assembly.

"In the case of the federal level, I expect there will be a general election early next year. Thus, holding a by-election for Batu Sapi at this point is just a waste of funds," he noted.

On whether emergency should also be imposed on the Bugaya state constituency, Ationg said Batu Sapi is now a precedent case, and such a declaration of emergency can be applied in other areas.

The Bugaya state seat fell vacant following the death of its incumbent, Datin Manis Muka Mohd Darah of Warisan on Nov 17.