

# 'By-election holiday a bad idea'

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GEORGE TOWN: It's thumb's down to Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng's declaration of a public holiday tomorrow to ensure a full turnout of voters for the Permatang Pauh by-election.

Businesses described Lim's decision as bad, saying he was only interested in playing politics rather than looking after their interests.

Lim said the holiday was to ensure a good turnout of voters for the by-election.

"We also request all factories to help their workers in Permatang Pauh to carry out their duties to determine not only their choice of wakil rakyat but also decide on the destiny of the country."

A total of 58,459 registered voters in the area are eligible to cast their votes for the parliamentary seat.

He said he had been mulling over the decision to declare a state public holiday since the Election Commission fixed Aug 26, a working day, as polling day.

The by-election sees a three-cornered fight involving



Barisan Nasional's Datuk Arif Shah Omar Shah, Parti Keadilan Rakyat's Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Angkatan Keadilan Insan Malaysia's Hanafi Hamat.

Malaysian Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry president N. Gobalakrishnan said it was unnecessary for Lim to declare a state-wide public holiday. He said Lim's action was unfair to businesses.

Gobalakrishnan's opinion was shared by Penang Malay Chamber of Commerce president Rizal Faris Mohideen Abdul Kader.

He said although every individual had a right to vote, there was no need for the state to be given a public holiday.

Meanwhile, other Penan-

## Najib: It's not necessary

PERMATANG PAUH: The Penang government's decision to declare tomorrow a public holiday is an unprecedented move, said Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

Najib said he could not see why a holiday was declared for the whole of Penang when the by-election was only being held in Permatang Pauh.

"If it was for the people to come out and vote, then the private sector employees or factory workers could have been given one or two hours to exercise their right before returning to work," he said, adding that the holiday would result in the state suffering losses in terms of output.

Najib said that he did not see the need for the Penang government to declare a holiday and he viewed it as a political consideration.

Asked if the Federal Government would overrule the decision, he said it would not as the matter was under the state government's jurisdiction.

He was speaking after visiting the Barisan Nasional operations centre at Mengkuang Titi here yesterday.

gites also voiced their unhappiness about the state-wide public holiday.

Businesswoman Amnah Mat, 53, said the public holiday was not necessary as it was not a general election.

"This only affects the people of Permatang Pauh. Furthermore, employers are the ones who should give time off to their workers to go and vote."

Another trader, who want-

ed to be known only as Tan, concurred with Amnah, saying the by-election only involved Permatang Pauh.

Public holiday or not, Tan said it would be business as usual for her.

Taxi driver S. Krishnan, 45 said: "If the public holiday is given to schools, then it is OK. But there is no need for a state-wide public holiday."

Meanwhile, in Kuala Lum-



Amnah Mat says employers are the ones who should give time off to their workers to go and vote

pur, Malaysian Employers Federation executive director Shamsuddin Bardan said companies in Penang could choose to close or to operate.

He said since the holiday was declared by the state government, they were not obligated to follow the decision.

Shamsuddin said under the Employment Act 1995, it was only compulsory for companies to shut down their premises if the Federal Government declared a public holiday.

He said the holiday would affect work productivity and

should only be given to companies in Permatang Pauh.

"For others, I think giving time off for a few hours is more appropriate than the whole day."

However, he said arguments would arise between companies and employees if the latter were not given a day off on the polling day.

National Union of the Teaching Profession president Anuar Ibrahim said the holiday would "interrupt education" but added that the by-election was a "very exclusive" situation.

Malaysian Trades Union Congress president Syed Shahir Syed Mohamud said the holiday was necessary as voters would not have to travel back and forth from their workplace to the polling station.

"We shouldn't forget that there are voters staying in Kulim, Parit Buntar or even further away from Permatang Pauh."

Cuepacs president Omar Asman said it was a good idea because parents would not have to worry about sending their children to school tomorrow. "It would be easier for them to carry out their responsibilities as voters."