

STATEMENT BY MR. M.P.D. NAIR, ASSISTANT MINISTER TO  
THE CHIEF SECRETARY, MADE IN THE LEG. ASSEMBLY ADJOURNMENT  
ON WEDNESDAY, JUNE 19, 1957, REGARDING NON-BROADCASTS  
BY RADIO MALAYA OF BY-ELECTION SPEECHES BY POLITICAL  
PARTIES.

Government has given its earnest and most careful consideration to the question of allowing broadcasting facilities to candidates contesting the coming Assembly by-elections as were given to candidates in the General Elections in 1955.

The questions posed were whether or not broadcasting facilities should be offered to candidates in the two by-elections generally or to those representing political parties alone.

These are the first by-elections to be held since the General Elections in 1955. The question is: Should the procedure in by-elections differ from that in a General Election. Government considers that procedure must differ since in this by-election only the electorate - 24,000 in number in the two constituencies, namely Cairnhill and Tanjong Pagar - is concerned.

The policy followed in the 1955 General Elections was that representatives of recognised parties should be allowed to broadcast and time was allotted to the different parties in proportion to the number of candidates contesting. Only candidates were allowed to give these party broadcasts and they spoke, not as individual candidates to their own constituencies, but on behalf of their parties for all the party candidates throughout Singapore. Their speeches were, therefore, of direct interest to all electors throughout the Island.

Independent candidates were not allowed to broadcast in the 1955 General Elections because they would have spoken only to their own constituencies and thus have had an unfair advantage over party candidates and because they were so numerous that it was impractical to find time for them all.

The "forum" type of broadcast was also limited to party representatives for the same reasons.

In the present by-elections, only the voters in two constituencies are concerned and on general grounds there is no justification to allow candidates to broadcast to the whole of Singapore. If only party candidates are allowed to broadcast they will be given much advantage over the Independents who will have good reason to protest at this unfair discrimination against them.

But if Independents are allowed to broadcast in this by-elections, it would be a departure from the Government's policy which might create a precedent leading to a fantastic state of affairs, especially at the next General Elections when hundreds of candidates, which may well include Independents, contesting in the 51 constituencies.

Consideration was also given to the question of whether a "forum" in which all candidates contesting the by-elections are invited to take part. This is, in fact, no difference to giving each candidate time to broadcast by himself and is, again, a departure from the principles mentioned earlier.

Requests were made by the Labour Front and the Peoples' Action Party for broadcasting facilities for their candidate contesting the by-elections. As far as I am aware, the other candidates have not asked by broadcasting facilities.

The Government is convinced that to agree to any suggestion that candidates in by-elections should be given broadcasting facilities conflicts with the policy concerning election broadcasts which is

based on the principle that Government is by the party and not by the individual.

Furthermore, Radio Malaya provides a Pan-Malayan service common to Singapore and the Federation of Malaya. We have consulted the Federation Government who are strongly against allowing broadcasts for their by-elections. This confirms our own view that it is not desirable to provide broadcasting facilities to any candidate for the coming by-elections.

Referring to the remarks made by the Hon. Member for Sembawang, it is not a question of democracy nor has this got anything to do with the democratic rights of the candidates. It is more a question of the proper use of the Radio to a justifiable degree.

JUNE 19, 1957.

(Time issued 1230 hours)