

Changes to electoral boundaries done fairly

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By FARID JAMALUDIN

KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir and the Election Commission have defended the proposed changes to the electoral boundaries and the creation of 25 new parliamentary and 59 new state seats, saying that it was done "in the interest of the people, the country and constitutional requirements."

The Prime Minister said the exercise was fair because it was based on population distribution.

Refuting claims that the Barisan Nasional had a hand in the exercise, Dr Mahathir said the commission carried out the exercise according to population in the respective constituencies.

"Let PAS say what they want," he told reporters after giving away prizes to the winners of the Centenary International Horse Show 2002 at the Selangor polo and Riding Club here yesterday.

He said Kelantan and Terengganu had no extra seats because many voters from there ran away to other states as they were not in favour of PAS rule.

"We realised that PAS had been bringing in voters from other areas to win elections in certain constituencies. In the Anak Bukit by-election last month, the party took 2,000 voters from my constituency (Kubang Pasu) to vote in Anak Bukit," he added.

EC secretary Datuk Wan Ahmad Wan Omar said critics should view the changes in the proper perspective instead of accusing the commission of gerrymandering to give the ruling coalition an upper hand in the next general election.

"If we were to conduct the exercise for the sake of MPs or the interests of NGOs, we will never be able to do our job as required by the law," he said in an interview here yesterday.

On Sunday, the DAP urged the commission to provide more details on its proposals to enable political parties to study the rationale, implications and impact of the exercise.

PAS had alleged that the exercise was designed to enable the Barisan to win comfortably in the next election.

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Commission wants all parties to air their views

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Wan Ahmad said the commission wanted to hear the views of all parties and was open to expressions and counter-proposals.

"At the end of the day, not all counter-proposals would be justified. If this happens, we will have to resort to powers that have been bestowed to us to make the final decision on the cases before us," he added.

To a question on why Perlis, Terengganu and Kedah were not given any new parliamentary or state seats, Wan Ahmad said that "immigration factors" in the three states were taken into consideration.

"No doubt the three states also experienced population growths, but the EC is of the opinion that it will be difficult to ascertain this," he added.

He said that many people were migrating from the three states to more developed states in search of better economic prospects.

To a question on Johor Baru Umno division's rejection of the proposals, Wan Ahmad said it had every right to express dissatisfaction or a make a counter-proposal.

"Present it at the state inquiry which we will soon conduct in every state. State your case then," he said.

Division chief Datuk Shahrir Abdul Samad said the proposed new electoral boundaries would include 30,000 new voters to the 100,000 in Johor Baru constituency.