

Nod for 25 new parliament seats

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MPs vote 149 to 34 to amend Constitution

THE Dewan Rakyat gave the nod to the amendment of Article 46 of the Federal Constitution, allowing 25 new parliamentary constituencies to be created.

MPs voted 149 to 34 for the amendment, which seeks to increase six seats in Johor, five each in Sabah and Selangor, three in Pahang, two in Penang and one each in Malacca, Negri Sembilan, Perak and Kuala Lumpur.

In an attempt to make changes to the amendment, Datuk Mustafa Ali (PAS-Dungun) proposed at the committee stage to add nine more parliamentary seats including two in Terengganu.

However, more than two-thirds of the MPs shot down the idea.

The Dewan had in April approved a motion to create 25 new parliamentary and 63 state seats, making a total of 219 parliamentary constituencies in the next general election.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in tabling the amendment, said the redelineation

exercise would make it easier for MPs and state assemblymen to visit and get closer to the people.

The exercise, he added, would also mean that the number of voters was reduced in constituencies which had too many.

Dr Mahathir said the last delimitation exercise by the Election Commission for the peninsula and Sabah was in 1994.

"The number of registered voters (excluding Sarawak) then was 7,438,156 and ~~it~~ increased to 9,093,649 in 2001, a rise of 23%," he said, adding that the last amendment on parliamentary seats was when the Putrajaya seat was created in 2001.

"There is no increase in the parliamentary seats for Perlis, Kelantan, Terengganu and Kedah since the commission was of the view that the seats for the states were enough," he said, to table-thumping from the opposition side.

Dr Mahathir said while it was obvious that the increase in the number of voters would require a redelin-

ation exercise, it was not possible to increase the number of seats in tandem with the number of voters.

"If this was done, the country would have too many MPs and state assemblymen. This will make Parliament matters difficult, not to mention higher Parliament costs."

He said in other countries with dense populations, each seat would have more than one million voters compared to that of 200,000 in Malaysia.

As for the state seats, state governments would have to make the amendments to their respective constitutions, he said.

Later at a press conference, Dr Mahathir expressed his confidence that Barisan Nasional would achieve victory in the general election.

On whether the Dewan Rakyat would be renovated to allow more seats for the additional 25 MPs, he said: "In Britain, the number of seats is much less than the number of MPs. If you come early, you'll get seats otherwise you'll have to sit on the floor."