

09/04/2003

Motion on EC proposal passed

reports on "Dewan Rakyat" by Ramlan Said; Shamini Darshni; Faarah Naz THE motion supporting the Election Commission's proposal for the creation of new parliamentary and state seats was passed by the Dewan Rakyat yesterday, but not before the Opposition staged a walkout when it was put to a vote.

Speaker Tun Mohamed Zahir Ismail announced the result, with 144 Barisan Nasional members supporting the motion tabled on Monday by acting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

As soon as Minister in Prime Minister's Department Datuk Rais Yatim ended replying to points raised by 22 MPs debating the proposal, Pas Kuala Terengganu member Dr Syed Azman Syed Ahmad Nawawi stood up and demanded that the Government withdraw the motion.

He claimed Rais had failed to reply to many of the queries and that the Government had rushed into getting the House's endorsement.

When Zahir overruled him, all Opposition MPs present left the House, to cheers and boos from backbenchers.

For Peninsular Malaysia, the commission has proposed the addition of 20 new parliamentary constituencies and 51 new state seats.

The new parliamentary seats are in Penang (two), Perak, Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Negri Sembilan and Malacca (one each), Pahang (three), Selangor (five) and Johor (six).

The proposed state seats are in Kelantan (two), Penang (seven), Perak (seven), Pahang (four), Selangor (eight), Negri Sembilan (four), Malacca (three) and Johor (16). Some constituencies will also have a name change.

In Sabah, it proposed the creation of five new parliamentary constituencies and 12 state seats.

Earlier, Rais told the House he was duty-bound to defend the EC against the harsh criticisms and comments hurled by Opposition MPs.

"I regret there was not even one word of thanks from the Opposition on the work done by the commission. If not because of the commission, how could you possibly be in the House today," he asked to loud table-thumping from BN MPs.

It was Rais' refusal to give way for clarification that angered the Opposition bench, who continued to heckle and harass him.

At one point, the Chair almost lost control of the situation when several Opposition MPs refused to sit down and demanded that they be heard.

The backbenchers responded with shouts of duduklah, duduklah (sit down) and jangan bagi jalan (don't give way). It took a warning from the Chair to bring order to the House.

Zahir said: "We have to carry out our task as MPs in a cultured manner. It is not good to fight; if you can't control your anger, it will only affect your health.

"We should conduct the meeting orderly. If you do not agree, put forward your arguments but do it accordingly. If this squabble continues, I am going to stop this debate and order voting be carried out."

Both sides then calmed down, allowing Rais to continue with his reply.

Rais said there was no truth to claims of "unseen hands" in deciding changes to the electoral boundaries.

"The BN does not indulge in this ... but I don't know about other people."

At one juncture, Datuk Hassan Ali (Pas-Parit Buntar) challenged Rais to

deny or confirm talk that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had rejected the commission's proposal to create several parliamentary seats in Kedah, Kelantan and Perlis.

The minister replied: "Not true".

Rais said if the Parit Buntar member was not satisfied, he was free to file a petition.

The minister said even the Government and Umno were not happy with some of the commission's decisions, such as when it rejected many appeals submitted by the party.

"The commission acts free of any political considerations. I did once convey to the commission's secretary our views on certain things but these were rejected," he said, adding this reflected the commission's impartiality in carrying out its duties.

Later at a Press conference, Abdullah said the Opposition staged the boycott for political gain.

"They want to turn it into an issue. They walked out hoping it will create an impact."

Abdullah said he regretted the action as the MPs did not exercise their rights when they were given a chance to do so.

"It is their right and yet they chose not to vote."

On claims that many questions raised by the Opposition were not answered, Abdullah said Rais had done the opposite.

"If they do not agree on the proposed constituencies, then don't contest."

Kerk Kim Hock (DAP-Kota Melaka) said they walked out to protest against the Government's move to "bulldoze" the motion through.

He said it was regrettable that Rais chose to sidestep various issues raised by the Opposition.

"From his replies, we can deduce that he does not really care except to have the motion endorsed."