

Which 'official map' is the EC using?

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By Peter Sinniah

I am glad to know that finally the EC is undertaking "a constituency border correction exercise using GIS."

The EC deputy chairperson, Wan Ahmad Wan Omar, then goes on to say that, "the exercise had been carried out in early 2010 in accordance with the EC's decision to synchronise electoral maps with the country's official map."

Which official map, can Wan Ahmad explain? Is the EC just using the maps drawn up by the Department of Survey and Mapping Malaysia (Jupem) or also incorporating the maps done by the Town and Country Planning Department and the local councils?

Wan Ahmad goes on to say: "When electoral maps and official maps were synchronised using a geographical system, it was found that Jalan 16/2 actually fell under the Rumah Kakitangan Universiti voting zone, which is under the Lembah Pantai constituency.

"He (Khalid) has not been moved. He is still registered at the same address, but the borders have been corrected in accordance with the Election Act 1958," Wan Ahmad said when contacted.

Fair enough, if it is located at the border. I can understand this as the maps given to all candidates vying for election till the last election have been mere photostat copies - in black-and-white, and not real, good maps.

If you look at all these maps, the following can be said:

Borders of neighbouring constituencies do not match maps that are placed together. The top western corner of the P109 Kapar constituency map is missing. One would not know where the border is

The border of Putrajaya is very ambiguous when seen in the P113 Sepang map. So how do we know where is the boundary? Khalid and the others have all the reasons to complain when this is not made clear. There are more such maps within Selangor.

The maps are in black and white. Where are the rivers, roads, railway lines and other features that often define the boundary of a constituency?

In the rural areas and estates, the boundaries are not clear-cut. I believe the boundaries run long drains and estate borders. How do we know what is what in a black-and-white map?

For a mere RM20, one can get a photocopy of a map showing all the following:

- a) Parliamentary constituency boundary;
- b) State assembly constituency boundary; and
- c) The voting district.

And all in black-and-white. And, the map does not show the locations of the polling stations.

For a country that is not considered Third World and boasting of some of the most advanced echnologies, we get a mere sheet showing the maps in black-and-white.

The maps should instead be provided in colour, in which case the voting district map would show clearly all the boundaries in a very definite manner, with the geographic features that define the boundaries

being clear for everyone to see.

The EC cannot say it does not have the resources. I believe the mapping exercise was given to one of the top GIS companies in Malaysia prior to 2010, even before the 2008 general election, if I am not wrong, and which definitely should have the capability to produce the maps in colour.

As a geographer and familiar with GIS capabilities, I am aware that this can easily be done with modern technology. The maps can be freshly printed in colour and given out, instead of photostat copies.

The EC should also make the maps available to the candidates in vector digital format. There is no reason, even now, for the EC to say it cannot print colour copies at all the three levels mentioned. The EC cannot say it cannot be done. Failing which, civil society is ready to help at the cost that EC has spent before.

Recently, civil society undertook this exercise and did a dry run for creating basic boundaries for Selangor and it was completed within a month, using available desktop GIS software.

The people doing it could have done this in a much quicker time if they did not have problems trying to understand the boundaries, which at time were very vague and made no sense. We had to use all the resources available to do this.

To avoid any misunderstanding, the EC should make available to those affected the exact boundaries at voting district levels.

Also, while doing the above dry run, we found out that the shifting of voters had taken place - from voting districts located in a particular constituency away from the border to other voting districts in another constituency to places further inside.

The people may have not noticed this before, but with greater interest in elections and the availability of Google Map and Google Earth, Malaysians are bound to be more critical of such shifts.

If the EC cannot handle this situation, then it should call experts from the mapping industry, geographers, political party leaders, town and country professionals and so on to make it happen.

Together, we can decide what should be made available on the maps. We have the best technologies available and civil society can handle it if the EC cannot.

After 12 elections, we cannot still be using black and white maps. Civil society can do it in colour with the same resources EC has, and with links to all the government authorities that do data collection for maps. I hope we can see proper, colour maps at the three levels for the coming election.

And finally, who decided that Jalan 16/2, which comes under Section 16 of Petaling Jaya City, should now become a part of Kuala Lumpur, just "because the area falls under the Rumah Kakitangan Universiti" and "the borders have been corrected in accordance with the Election Act 1958", as Wan Ahmad had said

Has the Kuala Lumpur City Hall stolen a part of Selangor? If so, then the road names should be changed to reflect it as part of KL and not Petaling Jaya! Perhaps the Bar Council should also look into this matter.

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