

**Respect the decision of voters, Pakatan
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COMMENT BN undoubtedly won the 13th general election by winning 133 parliamentary seats against the 89 seats secured by parties in Pakatan Rakyat. By western standards, this was a landslide victory though BN used to enjoy a super-majority (two-thirds) of the seats in Parliament prior to 2008.

As a society becomes more developed and mature, it is an almost impossible task to gain two-thirds control of the legislature.

azlanSingapore, a super-efficient and squeaky clean state, has suffered a similar fate with the PAP's control of Parliament slowly being eroded, although it still commands a comfortable majority.

This has happened despite the impressive social and economic development of Singapore which has been transformed it into a prominent international financial centre.

A new dimension and debate has been created by GE13 in view of BN securing less than 50 percent of the popular vote. The opposition parties and critics have capitalised on this by questioning our electoral system which has been used effectively and fruitfully since 1959.

Our system is based on Westminster model which is called first-past-the-post (FPTP), or winner-takes-all, as prescribed by the constitution. You form the government on the basis of winning the majority of the seats in legislature and not based on the popular vote.

gordon brown tony blair britain pm post 280607 farewellThus in 2001, the UK's Labour Party won 62.5 percent of the seats in House of Commons though it secured 40.7 percent of the popular vote. In 2005, Tony Blair's Labour Party once again formed the government again by winning 55.2 percent of the seats although the popular vote had gone down to 35.2 percent as a result of his unpopular war in Iraq.

It cost 26,908 votes to win a seat for Labour, against 44,368 for the Tories and 96,540 for LibDem party. This is the result of the demography and delineation of constituencies in Britain which tended to favour Labour because the north - where the party is popular - is less populated but larger in the geographical sense.

It is unfair and irresponsible for the opposition in Malaysia to question the system at this stage when it had accepted this system for years and made strong gains in the past two general elections. The opposition also prevailed in three states via this very system.

Pakatan has to accept defeat on the basis of the current electoral rules which it is fully entitled to amend in the next election provided this is passed by Parliament in full compliance with the necessary constitutional provisions.

FPTP has its advantages

Next question: Is the FPTP system really that bad, unfair and unwieldy? No, it is not. It has served the country well by ensuring the government is strong and stable which guarantees massive economic and social development.

A proportional representation (PR) system will bring in instability and uncertainty as seen in the Italian elections, where the winning party could not form the government. Many continental European systems are designed to encourage a coalition government involving a lot of horse-trading, with detrimental effects and tremendous social economic cost.

A weak government can't run a country efficiently and it has to spend more time on looking after competing interests.

The FPTP system will also prevent far-right or extremist politicians from entering the legislature.

It is claimed that British National Party and other British extreme parties failed to enter Parliament because they can't accumulate sufficient votes in a constituency.

In a PR system, they would have secured adequate minimal votes from supporters scattered all over the country to enter the House of Commons.

In the 2010 election, the BNP secured 1.9 percent of the popular vote which would have entitled its representatives to sit in the House if PR system had been used. In the 2009 European parliamentary election, the BNP had secured two seats: Yorkshire and Humber; and North West Region through the proportional representation method.

Many far-right politicians on the continent espousing anti-immigrant or religious intolerance have secured seats through the PR system. I doubt Geert Wilders,

whose caustic view on Islam is horrendous and provocative, would have entered the Dutch Parliament if he had contested under the FPTP system.

NONEThe other advantage of FPTP is to ensure voices from all parts of the country can be heard in Parliament.

Thus a voice from Gerik would be as strong as a voice from Puchong; they would have equal strength despite the disparity in the number of voters in each constituency. The voices of rural folk must be heard and respected.

Under the PR system, rural votes would be drowned out by the massive number of urban votes. But under the current system, a MP can still bring up local issues for attention and settlement, no matter how remote the area or how small the number of voters.

Of course no MP today would dare repeat what British politician and philosopher Edmund Burke said to his Bristol voters more than 200 years ago - that he would rejoice to hear their opinions but he would not be Bristol's envoy or take instructions from his electors. At Westminster, he would deliberate in the national interest, not theirs.

Today a MP is a Jack of all trades and must take care of all sectors. It is an arduous but honourable job.

'One person, one vote'

Finally, as to the disparity in the number of voters in some constituencies, it is an anomaly which most federal systems violate the 'one person, one vote' (OPOV) concept by giving some votes more weight than others.

NONESome supporters of federalism say that deviating from OPOV is a price worth paying in order to make sure that all elements in a diverse country feel included.

According to Canadian scholar Rupak Chattopadhyay, federal systems (and the constitutional anomalies that go with them) are desirable in countries that are big or ethnically mixed, or both.

In most federations the units have formally equal status, regardless of population, so voters in small units fare better. Thus the 544,270 residents of Wyoming State in the US have two senators - the same as the 37 million residents of California.

In Australia, the 507,600 people of Tasmania have the same weight in the Upper

House as the 7 million people in New South Wales. Similar 'unfair' advantages are given to Nova Scotia and Newfoundland in Canada. Large deviations from OPOV are the norm in many new democratic federations in a research conducted by Queen's University of Belfast.

The other factor is the physical size of rural constituencies which are many times greater than that of urban seats. Therefore, more resources are required to develop them, and the MP can help to monitor and implement the programmes involved.

Each country has its unique history and requirements beside its different level of development.

azlanIt is unfair to copy systems from other countries for adoption in Malaysia especially when the foreign systems have their own weaknesses.

It is purely opportunistic to demand changes to the electoral system and tarnish the same immediately after the general election; Pakatan is clearly a sore loser. It must wait for the next general election to make changes which can be done through proper and legal channels over the next five years.

Holding massive rallies with the aim of toppling a democratically-elected government is irresponsible, thoughtless, insensible and divisive when Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak is calling for national reconciliation.

The honourable task for Anwar Ibrahim is to acknowledge defeat and work with BN for the benefit of the people in this blessed country, which BN has served well.

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