

Bersih, Tindak say 'no' to any Pakatan-EC deal
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Electoral reform groups Bersih and Tindak Malaysia have insisted that Pakatan Rakyat should not agree to any increase in electoral constituencies.

“Civil society has made it very clear: No seat increase. Both Bersih and Tindak have made that sort of recommendation.

“We will consider more seats agreed to by the opposition parties as a betrayal of the rakyat,” Tindak Malaysia founder PY Wong said today.

At the same press conference, Bersih chairperson Maria Chin Abdullah (right) said Pakatan should not be lulled into thinking new seats would help the coalition to win elections.

She pointed out that past elections have shown, after each seat increase, that the BN would win by a landslide, as shown in the 2004 general election.

“That is a problem because you are taking voting powers away from the voters,” she said.

The redelineation exercise is expected to take place by the end of the year, and according to PKR vice-president Nurul Izzah Anwar, the EC has been approaching Pakatan politicians with ‘different promises to different parties’ to garner support for seat increases.

EC chairperson Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof had said that seat increases are necessary to ensure that voters can obtain good service from their elected representatives.

Assuming BN parliamentarians are in full support of the seat increases, the support of at least 14 Pakatan MPs will still be needed to approve the new parliamentary seat delineation.

Former Bersih co-chairperson Ambiga Sreenevasan had previously suggested that Pakatan should leverage this as a bargaining chip to pressure the EC to reform, in particular to clean up discrepancies in the electoral roll.

However, Wong argued that other electoral reforms need to be in place before the issue of seat increases can be discussed, including a reform of the constitutional provisions on redelineation.

After that, he said, the number of parliamentary seats in each state in Peninsular Malaysia needs to be redistributed, in order to reflect the population in each state.

“You have Johor with 26 seats with only two-thirds the population of Selangor, while

Selangor only has 22 seats. Then you have Pahang, with 14 seats.

“If you were to rebalance it, Selangor should have 30 seats. We don’t need to have an increase in seats. By right, Selangor should have an increase in seats; Johor, Pahang and Perak should have a reduction in seats. Malacca also should have an increase in seats.

“Maintain the total at 165 seats (throughout the peninsula), then equalise the seats to represent one man, one vote, one value,” Wong (right) said.

He also rubbished the claimed that more parliamentarians are needed to serve the people better, saying that EC has not conducted any study to justify the increase, and that other parliaments usually have a much smaller ratio of population to parliamentarians.

Judging from the ratio in other countries, he said, Malaysia should have only 150 MPs instead of the current 222.

Having more parliamentarians would also reduce the average time each member has to speak in Parliament, down from the current two-and-half hours a years.

Needed: MPs who will be more responsive

Instead, what we need are MPs who will be better connected and more responsive to voters, Wong said.

“If you go to Western Australia, there is one seat called Durack. Durack has one MP, 150,000 voters and is spread over an area of 1.5 million square kilometres – which is five times the size of Malaysia.

“How do they do it? Very simple, look at what (Selangor) Menteri Besar Mohd Azmin Ali did. He gave out his handphone number to everybody. You have problem? SMS (him).

“So the solution is actually not more MPs. The solution is for MPs to give out their handphone numbers for voters to reach them,” Wong said.

Maria added that what is also needed is not more MPs, but quality MPs who can bring substantive debates to Parliament, instead of engaging in shouting matches.