

East M'sia to get more Parliament seats, but not one-third yet

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Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has assured that Sabah and Sarawak will have more parliamentary seats before the next general election.

However, there was no guarantee it would amount to one-third of the Parliament seats for now.

“For Sabah and Sarawak, I have already made the decision and I have informed the cabinet and also the high-level MA63 (Malaysia Agreement 1963) committee: we will increase.

“No, there is no commitment to restore the one-third. But there is a commitment to an increase,” he told reporters during a breakfast session held in Kota Kinabalu today.

Anwar pointed out that there were differing interpretations of the provisions for one-third parliamentary representation.

He said that while Sabah and Sarawak noted that this was part of the MA63, others argued that this included Singapore, which left the federation in 1965.

“This is why I have asked the state legal advisers of Sabah and Sarawak and the attorney-general to settle that first, then come back to us.

“Having said this, I dare not make an interpretation of the Federal Constitution, but in principle, the increase in seats would be policy,” he added.

The one-third share of parliamentary seats was meant to be a safeguard to prevent the peninsula from unilaterally enacting constitutional amendments.

Several Sabah and Sarawak leaders have recently revived demands to restore that ratio.

Population imbalance

In the meantime, Anwar said seat increases are being considered because of a population imbalance between constituencies.

“It is up to the Election Commission, probably a slight increase due to the population.

“In the peninsula, there are constituencies that have already reached 350,000 or even 380,000 voters, compared with one parliamentary seat in Sabah that has only about 60,000.

“Because of that gap, we will have to consider an increase, but within a range that is not excessive,” he added.

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