

Jeffrey: Divide Sabah, S'wak into 16 new states
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Sabah opposition strongman Jeffrey Gapari Kitingan has urged that Sabah and Sarawak seriously consider creating new states within themselves.

He cites the vastness of the territory, empowerment either within (or outside) Malaysia, greater efficiencies through decentralisation and maximisation of potential, as reasons for doing so.

His idea is that Sabah be carved up into five states along the borders of the existing residencies viz. Tawau, Sandakan and Kudat along the eastern and northern seaboard, and West Coast and Pedalaman elsewhere, and to be known as the Sabah states.

sarawakThe 11 existing divisions in neighbouring Sarawak should re-emerge as new states i.e. Kuching, Samarahan, Sri Aman, Betong, Sarikei, Sibul, Mukah, Kapit, Bintulu, Miri and Limbang.

"The total of 16 states and one federal territory in Malaysian Borneo will eclipse the 11 states and two federal territories in peninsular Malaysia," pointed out Jeffrey in his keynote address at a closed-door forum, 'Formation of Malaysia, a Promise Revisited and the Way Forward' on Saturday in Kota Kinabalu.

The forum was a curtain-raiser to the first official celebration of Malaysia Day on Sept 16.

The event was organised by the Borneo Heritage Foundation (BHF) in association with the Common Interest Group Malaysia (CigMA), an ad hoc apolitical movement.

Power shift

If there's method in Jeffrey's "madness", it's this - that the new states will help Sabah and Sarawak win back the 32 percent share of the seats in the Malaysian Parliament that Malaysia outside peninsular Malaysia had until Singapore "was booted out in 1965".

september 16 sarawak and sabah independence"With Singapore out of Malaysia, the island's 15 seats in the Malaysian Parliament (141) should have gone collectively to Sabah (14) and Sarawak (16)," recalled Jeffrey. "Instead, peninsular Malaysia (96) took seven of Singapore's seats for a new total of 103 and the remainder was divided between Sabah and Sarawak to give them 18 and 20 respectively.

This resulted in the original power balance between peninsular Malaysia and non-peninsular Malaysia, i.e. 68 percent to 32 percent respectively, to become even more in favour of the former.

He left it to the 500-odd invited participants - opinion leaders, students and others - to work out the ratio today: 74.32 percent (peninsular Malaysia) and 25.67 percent (Sabah/Sarawak).

The logical deduction of the audience, prompted by Jeffrey, was that 14 of the 165 seats held today in Parliament by peninsular Malaysia belong legitimately to Sabah and Sarawak.

jeffrey kitingan sabah 310508"From being a partnership of Malaya, Singapore, Sabah and

Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo degenerated after 1965 to be two out of 13 states," said Jeffrey. "The federal government refused to acknowledge the status of Sabah and Sarawak. This was in order to create more parliamentary seats for states in peninsular Malaysia at the expense of Sabah and Sarawak."

Jeffrey sees this as the main reason why the federal government was able to whittle away at the 20 Points (Sabah) and 18 Points (Sarawak) entrenched in the federal constitution.

The 20 and 18 Points respectively are the basis for the 1963 Malaysia Agreement and the formation of the new federation.

"The creation of new states in Sabah and Sarawak will neutralise peninsular Malaysia's argument that it has 11 states and two federal territories to merit its present seats in Parliament," reiterated Jeffrey. "Hopefully, this would be the way to reverse the recolonisation of Sabah and Sarawak by peninsular Malaysia in the wake of the British departure in 1963."

The number of seats any particular state should have in Parliament, stressed Jeffrey, should not only be based on population - "a peninsular Malaysia argument" - but also on territory, economic potential, history and law.

Ills of recolonisation

Recolonisation has also allegedly meant the degeneration of the federation into a unitary state, the erosion of the doctrine of separation of powers which assures checks-and-balances, the lack of transparency, accountability and good governance, and the advent of a police state sanctioned by four unrepealed emergency ordinances.

Alternatively, the politician in Jeffrey - he's also Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) vice-president - challenged the audience to consider two other strategic options viz. accept and work within the current situation with all its constraints, or push for a referendum in Sabah and Sarawak as proposed previously by former Sabah chief minister Harris Salleh.

Jeffrey's paper was also a litany of oft-cited woes in the two states.

Grinding poverty with all its attendant illls topped the list, followed by appalling public healthcare and educational standards, disenfranchisement with the influx of illegal immigrants, the lack of security, Borneo-nisation, and "the wholesale plunder" of oil and gas reserves by Petronas in return for "a measly five percent oil royalty".

Four other speakers contributed their papers as well. They also went over familiar territory as in Jeffrey's paper.

Briefly, former Sarawak deputy chief minister James Wong's paper was on the equal partnership and merger concept of the Federation of Malaysia, the role and findings of the Cobbold Commission, the Inter-Governmental Committee and the UN Special Mission.

NONEThe ailing Wong, 88, was represented by Sarawak PKR chief Baru Bian (left), a Lun Bawang, lawyer and native land rights activist tipped by the opposition to be the next chief minister.

Sabah Umno veteran Karim Ghani, a translator for the Cobbold Commission, spoke on whether Malaysia was 13 states or one federation with three components and expressed

disappointment with his party.

He insisted that Malaysia was one federation with three components. He feels that this could be easily resolved by the respective state assemblies in Sabah and Sarawak.

Three components

Sabah Law Association (SLA) representative Sukumar Vanugopal gave a detailed and highly technical explanation on the numerous breaches of the 20 Points in the federal constitution which he attributed to Sabah and Sarawak being under-represented in Parliament.

He also warned that the federal constitution was being tampered with because of the rejection of the basic structure doctrine by the courts. The federal constitution has been amended over 600 times within 50 years compared with the US constitution which has seen only 27 amendments in the last 200 years, chipped in lawyer Nilakrisna James from the floor.

Former state secretary Simon Sipaun (right) gave his personal views and observations on the formation of Malaysia which he witnessed as a young man of 25 years.

Sipaun, along with former federal deputy minister Kalakau Untol, also moderated questions and presentations from the floor and summed up the speakers in his closing remarks.

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