

PLANS AFOOT TO ALLOCATE MORE SEATS

Govt has agreed in principle to increase Sabah's and Sarawak's parliamentary seats, says Anwar

ADIB POVERA
AND OLIVIA MIWIL
KOTA KINABALU
news@nst.com.my

THE decision to increase parliamentary seats for Sabah and Sarawak has been adopted as a policy under the unity government, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said.

Although the government had not committed to granting Sabah and Sarawak a one-third representation in Dewan Rakyat, Anwar said the proposal to increase their seats had been

agreed to in principle.

"There is no commitment to increasing the number to one-third representation for Sabah and Sarawak. However, we are committed to increasing the parliamentary seats. As a matter of policy, we must increase them. It is up to the Election Commission to decide the number of additional seats," he said here yesterday.

Anwar was responding to questions on the unity government's commitment to meeting Sabah and Sarawak leaders' calls for greater representation in Parliament.

"For Sabah and Sarawak, I have made the decision and informed

the cabinet that we will increase the number of seats.

"I have instructed the state legal advisers in Sabah and Sarawak, as well as the Attorney-General, to resolve the matter, and the principle of increasing parliamentary seats has already become policy," he said.

The increase in seats is part of ongoing negotiations under the Malaysia Agreement 1963 (MA63) committee. Sabah and Sarawak currently have 25 and 31 parliamentary seats, respectively.

Last month, when announcing the plan for additional seats in Tawau, Anwar said it would mark the first time since 1963 that a prime minister had agreed to increase parliamentary representation for both states.

Meanwhile, Bernama reported Anwar as saying that the government was not deceiving the peo-

ple over Sabah's special grant based on 40 per cent of its revenue, but was committed to resolving the matter transparently and comprehensively.

Anwar reiterated the federal government's commitment not to appeal the Kota Kinabalu High Court's decision regarding Sabah's entitlement to the special grant.

He said this during his speech at the *PM Sayang Sabah* meet-and-greet programme with community leaders of the Tulid state constituency at Padang Kampung Menawo Ulu in Keningau.

He said the issue had, however, been exploited by the opposition for the Sabah election.

In **Tuaran**, caretaker Chief Minister Datuk Seri Hajiji Noor said the federal government's announcement to increase parliamentary representation for

Sabah and Sarawak was a move in the right direction and long-awaited by both states.

He said the matter deserved special attention, given the vast land areas and population growth in both states.

"In our area too, the population has increased. Take Kinabatangan as an example. It is as large as Pahang, but with one parliamentary seat only for the entire area.

"For Tuaran, we have one parliamentary seat, but it is bigger than Perlis," he said after attending a meeting with the Gabungan Rakyat Sabah (GRS) election machinery for Sulaman at Kampung Lok Batik here yesterday.

Hajiji, who is also GRS chairman, added that the need to increase parliamentary seats was also in line with the spirit of MA63. **Additional reporting by Fahmi Tajuddin**