

**Pakatan MPs claim Umno, Perkasa twisting Article 153**  
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**By Melissa Chi**

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 27 — The constitutional provision outlining the special position of Bumiputeras has been manipulated by Umno and is now being used as a weapon of aggression, Pakatan Rakyat (PR) lawmakers claimed today amid growing debate on the subject.

On Saturday, National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) chairman Reverend Dr Eu Hong Seng said Article 153 of the Federal Constitution is akin to “bullying” if it only protects the rights of one group.

Today, several PR lawmakers suggested that Article 153 was being intentionally conflated with the concept of “ketuanan Melayu”, or Malay supremacy.

“Reverend Eu mentioned it should be inclusive and I think it did try to cover it (inclusiveness),” PAS Shah Alam MP Khalid Samad said today. “Fundamentally it is inclusive but has been manipulated and it is not about protection anymore but aggression.”

Eu’s remark sparked protest from Malay rights group Perkasa and drew a denial today from Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin that the provision had been used to bully any community.

On Sunday, Perkasa claimed the provision kept the country peaceful, further claiming that the race riots of May 13, 1969 happened because it was not implemented properly.

“This country is peaceful because of Article 153 which protects the rights of Bumiputeras who are the majority in this country.

“The reverend needs to remember that Christians are able to practise their religion without worry in this country because of Article 153,” Perkasa secretary-general Syed Hasan Syed Ali had said last week.

Article 153 states that “it shall be the responsibility of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong to safeguard the special position of the Malays and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak and the legitimate interests of other communities in accordance with the provisions of this Article.”

Constitutional expert Prof Abdul Aziz Bari also chimed in on Sunday to say this meant “the King must also make sure that (safeguarding Bumiputeras) must not be done at the expense of the legitimate interests of other communities.”

Today, Khalid echoed the view and similarly noted the inclusion of the phrase “other communities.”

“What you want to maintain in the Constitution is that it is recognition of historical facts and that Malays do not lose out even if citizenships were given to the Chinese and Indians.

"Unfortunately it leaves a lot of room for manipulation and it is manipulated by Umno and people such as those in Perkasa where they emphasise on Ketuanan Melayu instead of making sure Malays do not lose out," said Khalid.

He also noted the Article refers to special privileges, and not special rights.

PKR secretary-general Saifuddin Nasution Ismail agreed with Khalid and spoke of rampant abuse of Article 153 carried out under the guise of safeguarding Malay and Bumiputera interests.

Citing the award of contracts and licensing rights for example, Saifuddin said these appeared to only be given to a core group of politically-connected Malays rather than to the community at large.

"I am clearly guided by the stance agreed by Pakatan Rakyat on this Article 153 ... which is the position of the Malay rulers, Bahasa Malaysia and Islam as the official language and religion of the country and Article 153 as stated clearly in the Malaysian Constitution but at the same time to also look into the interest of minority including those in Sabah and Sarawak," he said.

PKR vice-president Fuziah Salleh said that it was clear the provision was inclusive despite the specific mention of the Bumiputeras and Malays.

"When we give special rights to Bumiputeras, it does not deny the rights of the others as there are other parts of the Constitution that does not provide for discrimination," the Kuantan MP added.

PAS Kuala Selangor MP Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad also said the clause is self-explanatory and that it provides a "very balanced and just" view of what it should be.

"I have had this understanding for a long time that Article 153 in no way compromises nor usurps any legitimate interests or rights of any ethnic group.

"So if only Perkasa or Ibrahim Ali would read this provision and not just selectively or preferentially highlight what he wants," he said.

He also stressed that Malays and Bumiputeras had a "special position" that had to be guarded, and not special rights.

"We must move on to bring the nation, both BN and the opposition, forward to one that really confronts and faces the many challenges of the problems in our nation," he said.

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