

Pakatan MPs to use parliamentary strength to block unfair redelineation
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KUALA LUMPUR, May 22 — Pakatan Rakyat (PR) federal lawmakers have vowed to make full use of their increased parliamentary numbers to ensure constituencies are fairly redrawn when the Election Commission (EC) kicks off the redelineation exercise this year-end.

PKR's Pandan MP Rafizi Ramli reminded that if the exercise involves an increase in seat numbers, a two-thirds majority vote is needed to approve the changes before they are passed by the lower House.

The ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) does not have required two-thirds majority in Parliament, with only 133 seats to PR's 89 seats, and will require votes from opposition lawmakers to approve the exercise.

"But if they (EC) do not add constituencies and the process only includes redrawing boundaries, this could be dangerous as this allows gerrymandering and there is no need for a two-third vote.

"In the past, they (BN) score big in the elections because the redelineation exercise is often in [their] favour ... they disperse our support to other seats," Rafizi told The Malaysian Insider.

But the PKR strategy director said it was likely that, this time, redelineation would include an increase in seat numbers.

He said that in tandem with the DAP's "one vote, one value" campaign push, PR lawmakers will fight hard to use their parliamentary powers to ensure voters are more fairly distributed unlike the present situation.

The allegedly unfair dispersal of voters in constituencies here has been used as a major argument point by PR lawmakers to back accusations that gerrymandering in favour of BN has helped the ruling pact stay in power.

In a recent article on news portal FZ.com, Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS) chief executive Wan Saiful Wan Jan had pointed out that the existing delineation of constituencies defies logic in terms of size and the number of voters.

"Putrajaya has 15,791 voters compared with Kapar, which has 144,159 voters. It doesn't make sense."

"And then you have a state seat like Sri Serdang with 72,769 voters which is higher than the Putrajaya parliamentary seat," he was quoted saying.

This has also earned the attention of the foreign media.

In the Wall Street Journal yesterday, Hong Kong journalist Philip Bowring commented on how PR had lost the election despite winning 51 per cent of the popular vote — an outcome that opposition lawmakers and civil society groups have blamed on unfair gerrymandering.

"Thanks to an extreme anti-urban bias and the abolition of rules governing the relative size of constituencies, the largest constituency has nine times more voters than the smallest.

"On that basis, and taking account of the number of closely fought seats, the opposition would probably have to win at least 58 per cent of the popular vote to get a majority of seats," Bowring wrote.

Speaking to The Malaysian Insider, DAP's publicity secretary Tony Pua said with the polls now over and efforts underway to challenge some of the results through election petitions, the next step for PR would be to focus on the coming redelineation exercise.

The EC recently said that the exercise will be kicked off by year-end after the six-month process to hear election petitions are completed. The petitions must be filed within 21 days after the results of the election are gazetted.

The Federal Constitution prohibits a redelineation exercise from being conducted within eight years of the last. The EC last redrew constituency lines in 2003.

"The focus will be on one man, one vote, one value, apart from pushing other related reforms. What we want is a more level playing field in the next general election.

"And this means that we should not be seeing a coalition winning the popular vote but losing the parliamentary seat count by a mile," Pua said.

"Given that BN does not have two-thirds majority in Parliament, the exercise must be agreeable to both sides," he added.

DAP's Rasah MP Anthony Loke agreed with his party colleague, saying it was important that PR makes full use of its influence in Parliament and put up a fight if they are disagreeable to the EC's redelineation proposal.

"We have more than one-third of our MPs in Parliament. We are a strong enough force to ensure that redelineation is done properly and professionally.

"The weightage of votes cannot be as ridiculous as it is today," he said.

PAS's Shah Alam MP Khalid Samad said there must be a more "reasonable" spread of voters across the constituencies to ensure that every vote has the same value across all constituencies.

"In some cases, you have a parliamentary seat with less than 10,000 voters... and elsewhere, you have seats with over 100,000 voters.

"We will be trying to push for fairer representation across the board," he said.

BN snapped up 133 federal seats to PR's 89 seats in the May 5 polls but for the first time since 1969, the ruling pact lost the popular vote, scoring just under 48 per cent of the votes cast to PR's 51 per cent.

PR leaders immediately cried foul with its de facto chief Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim insisting that his federal opposition pact had won the election.

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