

Malaysia's election system drawn to sustain BN's dominance, don tells forum
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PETALING JAYA, May 23 — Barisan Nasional's (BN) rule will continue as long as Malaysia uses the first-past-the-post voting system despite redelineation, academic Amer Saifude told a forum here last night.

The Universiti Malaya Centre for Democracy and Elections (Umcedel) deputy director said the expected redelineation of constituencies by year-end would benefit Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's coalition and even better its Election 2013 performance.

"As long as we practice this first-past-the-post system, it will be advantageous to BN," Amer told a forum on the 13th general election outcome.

"History has shown that every time there is a re-demarcation process, BN would perform better," he added.

Despite winning only 47 per cent of the popular vote in the May 5 elections, Najib saw his coalition keeping the government with a simple majority, bagging 133 federal seats against Pakatan Rakyat's (PR) 89.

Amer pointed out that Najib was the first BN chief to score a weaker mandate in his maiden bid for power, a reflection of the faulty fundamentals of the first-past-the-post system.

The Umcedel deputy director said the system's glaring defect could be seen in how BN, bar a few exceptions, had never won the popular vote by more than 60 per cent but yet managed to win a huge number of the seats it contested in.

He also highlighted how several constituencies nationwide had been gerrymandered without reasonable justifications.

"Sometimes you see the re-demarcation is illogical and unfair... the redelineation process is often made to serve the interest of certain parties," he said.

The panel of speakers at last night's forum. — Picture by Saw Siow Feng
Amer, however, noted that any move to redraw the constituencies must first have the consent of at least half of the members of the Dewan Rakyat.

PR federal lawmakers have signalled their intention 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 has said 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 allegedly unfair dispersal of voters in constituencies 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 for 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.

The issue has also earned the attention of the foreign media, with the Wall Street Journal, in a comment written by its Hong Kong-based journalist Philip Bowring, pointed to 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 gerrymandering.

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

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