

Citing Kedah's redelineation, DAP MP accuses EC of bias and gerrymandering
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By Ida Lim

KUALA LUMPUR, May 31 — A DAP MP today accused the Election Commission (EC) of bias towards the Barisan Nasional (BN) in the 2003 redelineation of constituencies in Kedah, claiming that the disparity in voter numbers in different seats there showed that the commission had ignored the "rural weightage" principle that it had held up in its defence.

The DAP's Ong Kian Ming singled out EC deputy chairman Datuk Wan Ahmad Wan Omar, before further claiming that "gerrymandering" was done in Kedah where he alleged seat boundaries were redrawn to help BN's Umno win over rival PAS.

"The fact of the matter is that the Election Commission did not do their job in accordance with the law but was in fact heavily biased towards the BN during the 2003 redelineation exercise when Wan Ahmad was also the deputy chairman of the EC," the Serdang MP said in a statement, adding that this was "most obvious" in Kedah where no new seats were added in 2003.

Ong attacked the EC for allegedly violating the "rural weightage" principle where larger rural areas are allocated fewer voters while smaller urban seats have more voters.

"The Election Commission has tried to defend the disparity in the number of voters per seat by referring to the 'rural weightage' principle where rural areas, with poorer transportation networks and a larger area of coverage, should have a smaller number of voters compared to urban areas which are more compact and are more accessible.

"But in Kedah, during the 2003 redelineation exercise, this principle was clearly violated," said the DAP leader, who will head the party's parliamentary committee to study redelineation issues.

Ong (picture) said non-Malay voters were moved from BN's safe seats into PAS-held federal seats in Kedah, citing the shift of Alor Star voters to Kuala Kedah and Pokok Sena, and Merbok to Jerai. Padang Serai voters were also moved to Baling, he said.

"This blatant gerrymandering on the part of the Election Commission was obvious when we compared the number of voters and the area of coverage of these seats in 2003," Ong said, pointing to statistics on Kedah seats in 2003 and 2013.

He illustrated this with Alor Star, the state's smallest and most urbanised federal seat which, he said, had 56,007 voters in 2003, fewer than Pokok Sena and Kuala Kedah, adjoining seats which are bigger and less urban, at 64,912 and 73,942 voters respectively.

"This disparity can still be seen in the 2013 general election figures. Alor Star now has 69,189 voters compared to 80,916 for Pokok Sena and 95,534 for Kuala Kedah."

He then highlighted the case of Baling, a mostly-rural parliamentary seat where the constituency size was increased after the inclusion of a state seat where BN had a strong presence.

"The 2003 delimitation exercise increased the area of coverage for Baling from 1,107km² to

1,544km², which makes the size of the Baling seat slightly smaller than the entire state of Malacca. This was because one of the strong Umno state seats in the adjoining Padang Serai parliamentary constituency — Kuala Ketil — was moved to Baling.

“The result was that Padang Serai, a much more urban seat, ended up with fewer voters (51,778) compared to the much larger Baling (with 73,942 voters).

“This disparity can still be seen from the 2013 GE figures. Baling now has 93,376 voters (second largest in Kedah) compared to 74,425 voters for the more urbanised seat of Padang Serai.”

Despite the EC allegedly ignoring the rural weightage, Ong said the purported gerrymandering had hurt BN's 2008 haul in Kedah.

“The rural weightage principal was clearly not followed by the Election Commission during the 2003 redelineation exercise in Kedah. In an ironic twist of fate, this blatant gerrymandering ended up hurting the BN in 2008 because the non-Malay voters who were considered hardcore BN supporters, who would never vote for PAS, switched their votes to the opposition in the 2008 general election.

“Among the Election Commission members, Wan Ahmad is the only one who was part of the EC during the biased 2003 redelineation exercise. As such, he is the least qualified member of the EC to defend the EC's record in ensuring a fair redelineation exercise that will start at the end of the year.

“As long as Wan Ahmad is one of the members of the Election Commission who will oversee the upcoming redelineation exercise, I have no confidence whatsoever that it will be done transparently, fairly and in accordance to the ‘one-man, one-vote’ principle,” Ong said.

In 2008, the federal opposition Pakatan Rakyat wrest control of BN-ruled Kedah for the first time, but lost the state to BN in this year's May 5 polls.

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