

Bersih slams EC's boundary redrawing for Sarawak
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The Election Commission's (EC) proposal to redraw electoral boundaries in Sarawak and raise the number of seats by 11 has caused inequalities in the constituency sizes, polls watchdog Bersih 2.0 said today.

The EC's maps on the proposed new boundaries are also incomplete and the commission also lacks transparency in engaging the public over the redelineation exercise, it added.

Elections analyst and Bersih spokesperson Dr Wong Chin Huat said the EC had issued incomplete maps of the 11 proposed new state seats in Sarawak, which would increase the number of seats from 71 to 82.

"We found that the EC did not produce complete electoral maps and that the distribution of voters was uneven," said Wong at a press conference today. He said this was a violation of Schedule 13 in the Federal Constitution, which required the EC to disclose its proposals on redelineation to the public for feedback and objections.

Wong also questioned why the EC was placing restrictions on the public in making objections to the proposed redelineation in Sarawak.

He said the EC has only allowed each group making objections to be represented by three people without the presence of a lawyer, and only for a limited time of 30 minutes.

The law provides for an objection period of one month in a redelineation exercise.

Wong said the EC's handling of Sarawak's redelineation was unconstitutional and Bersih was strongly opposed to it.

"We are ready to bring the matter to court," he said.

The EC yesterday put on public display its recommendations for an increase of 11 seats to Sarawak's legislative assembly. The proposal, however, was not put up online, which Wong also took issue with.

The EC has proposed the 11 new seats as N13 Batu Kitang, N17 Stakan, N18 Serembu, N23 Triboh, N26 Gedong, N40 Kabong, N57 Telian, N63 Selirik, N66

Murum, N70 Samalaju and N78 Long Lama.

Besides the new seats, the EC has also recommended a change of name for one parliamentary and four state constituencies.

It has proposed that the parliamentary constituency of P198 Mambong be renamed P198 Puncak Borneo and the state constituencies of N19 Bengoh, N34 Batang Air, N41 Belawai and N68 Kidurong be renamed N19 Mambong, N34 Batang Ai, N41 Kuala Rajang and N68 Tanjong Batu respectively.

The proposed increase in seats is believed to be a move done now because of impending state elections, which must be held by April 2016. There is also speculation that a snap poll could be held this year.

Bersih and the EC have been at loggerheads over an upcoming nationwide redelineation exercise, with the civil society group warning the commission not to increase the number of parliamentary seats and to conduct the process transparently.

A national redelineation exercise is overdue since the last one held in 2003. The exercise to redraw electoral boundaries is supposed to be done once every eight years to cater to development and the increase in the number of voters.

Bersih and other critics, however, fear that the ruling Barisan Nasional government would use the exercise as a tool to redraw boundaries or increase the number of seats in its favour.

Malaysia practices a first-past-the-post system in elections where the winner takes all and forms the government of the day by having the most number of seats in parliament, notwithstanding its share of the popular vote. – January 6, 2015.

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