

PKR mulls judicial review to stop redelineation plan for Sarawak
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Opposition lawmakers reacted angrily to the Election Commission's (EC) proposed redelineation of state seats in Sarawak with PKR now threatening to file for a court injunction to stop the exercise.

Sarawak PKR chief Baru Bian (pic) said the EC has seven days to provide full and detailed disclosure on its proposal and the list of voters affected by the exercise.

He also threatened to file for a judicial review if the EC failed to do so.

"We are of the view that the details that are disclosed are not sufficient for voters to raise any objection," he said.

Voters have only 30 days, until February 5, to raise their objections to the proposed delineation.

The Ba Kelalan assemblyman said information disclosed by EC was insufficient as it only has the 11 proposed seats, the map showing the proposed electoral boundaries and the total of number of voters affected.

"There is no list of voters in the new constituencies. Unless you study the electoral map carefully, you would not know what are the affected constituencies."

For example, he said, the EC had failed to mention that the Batu Lintang constituency, held by his deputy See Chee How, had been moved from the Stampin parliamentary constituency to the Bandar Kuching constituency. Baru said they only realised it upon close scrutiny of the new election map.

"These kind of movements could affect the voters. So, who are affected and where have they been moved, there are no details."

Baru said information such as these are crucial for voters to raise their objections.

"Without these details, no voter could raise an objection," he said in his reaction to the EC's redelineation proposal which were put on display yesterday at the EC head office at Bangunan Sultan Iskandar in Kuching and 16 district offices for public feedback on its recommendations to increase the number of state constituencies by 11 to 82.

"There is ground for legal action. We are looking into that possibility to stop the whole process," he said.

"We cannot assume and prejudge why they withheld details... why (they) withhold (information) for whatever reason.

"Let's just say that it is suffice to bring the matter to court."

Baru said he was also surprised to note that the proposed new seats were all in the semi-urban/rural areas and in areas – with the exception of Batu Kitang – with largely Bumiputera voters.

He said he would tend to agree "if someone suggests there was an attempt at gerrymandering to strengthen the Barisan Nasional's grip in the rural areas".

The proposed seats are Batu Kitang (designated as N13), Stakan (N17), Serembu (N18), Triboh (N23), Gedong (N26), Kabong (N40), Telian (N57), Selirik (N63) Murum (N66), Samalaju (N70), and Long Lama (N78).

Stampin parliamentary constituency, made up of the state seats of Batu Lintang, Kota Sentosa and Batu Kawah in the 2013 general election, has 69% Chinese voters.

By moving Batu Lintang and over 24,000 largely Chinese voters to DAP-held Bandar Kuching and replacing Batu Lintang with the new seat of Batu Kitang and its largely Bumiputera voters will mean that the percentage of Chinese voters in the Stampin constituency will be diluted by the largely Bidayuh and Malay voters living in the Batu Kitang area.

Baru said he was also baffled why urban seats with voters of 30,000, such as the Chinese majority seat of Pending, was not redelineated.

"At least these urban seats should be redelienated. They are highly concentrated.

"Why are they left untouched. Why redelineate small rural seats?"

Meanwhile, DAP state chief Chong Chieng Jen said in a statement that the delineation exercise "has dispelled all doubts that the EC is just a tool of the BN, helping the BN to consolidate its position and power base".

"With such blatant disregard to the fundamental principle of fairness in the delineation exercise, the EC might as well apply to join as the 14th political party of the BN."

Chong said the proposed delineation defied the basic principle of one-person-one-vote-one-value.

"The most glaring anomaly is the Bandar Kuching parliamentary constituency, which is already one of the most populous constituencies (52,000 voters), has an addition of the Batu Lintang state constituency, increasing the number of its voters by another 25,000 to more than 78,000.

"This disgraceful attempt on the part of the EC to help BN to win more seats is based on the assumption that the Malay and Dayak voters in the rural areas will forever support the BN.

"Much as the EC would like to help the BN, such assumption of perpetual support from Malay and Dayak in the rural areas will not stay unchanged forever.

"This is because as the society progresses and with the coming of the Internet age, there will be access to information to the Malay and Dayak communities in the rural areas. This trend could be seen from the increase in Malay and Dayak support in the urban areas.

"Therefore, unless the BN intends to keep the rural community uninformed of the current political and economic development of the country and the state, there will surely be a change in the political mindset of the rural people."

The Sarawak state legislative assembly in its Budget sitting last November agreed to increase the number of seats from the current 71 to 82 with the opposition showing general reservation amidst claims of possible gerrymandering. – January 6, 2015.

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