

This perception of unfairness has to be addressed should we all believe that the basic principle of natural justice - to be fair in its principle and transparent in its processes. We have to believe that we are all one community. It is only on this principle of fairness that lays the foundation of the whole community that is progressive and moderate. We are fully committed to the politics of reasoning and moderate principle.

We proposed that this in balance be reversed over a period of time, beginning from this proposed amendment. It is proposed that seats that have more than 20,000 voters be re-delineated to provide for new seats or shared with other seats where the number of voters per seat is not more than 20,000. This will still give a ratio of 1 to 4 (N.26 Gedong with the proposed maximum of 20,000 voters for a seat - 6,340:20,000), which is a reduction of 1 to 5 as it currently stands.

Over a period of time this discrepancy is to be further reduced until we achieve the true principle and spirit of democracy, that is - to each man a vote of same value.

Sarawak United Peoples' Party



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SARAWAKIANS

WANT ELECTORAL FAIRNESS



The proposal by Election Commission recommends for the increase of the State seats by 11 seats, from 71 to 82. The total number of voters in Sarawak is 1,109,134. This gives an average seat with 13,526 voters per seat.

The new seat of N26 Gedong has the least number of voters, 6,340; the seat with the most voters is N54 Pelawan with 31,388. This is a ratio of 1 to 5.

There are 34 seats where the number of voters are below 10,000. In addition to the 34 seats, there are another 18 seats where the number of voters are below the average of 13,526. This means 52 out of 82 seats have number of voters below the average. On the other hand, there are 13 seats where the number of voters are more than 20,000.

The proposal does not live up to the cardinal principle of democracy, which is one man one vote. In the original Constitution of Malaya in 1957 when Malaya just gained independence from Britain, this cardinal principle was adhered to. The constitution then provided for weightage difference of 15% percent. The Malayan Constitution was then amended in 1962 to increase the weightage difference by not more than half, that is the ratio of 1:2, to cater for the urban and rural divide.

Paragraph (c) of section 2 of the Thirteenth Schedule of the then Malaya Constitution reads: "The number of electors within each constituency ought to be approximately equal throughout the unit of review except that, having regard to the greater difficulty of reaching electors in the country districts and other disadvantages facing rural constituencies, a measure of weightage for area ought to be given to such constituencies, to the extent that in some cases a rural constituency may contain as little as half of the electors of any urban constituency."

The Constitutional amendment in 1973 completely did away with the weightage control by deleting the safeguard in the last sentence.

This denies the citizen his fair share in the decision making process. Effectively, urban voters have been greatly dis-enfranchised, as their votes are equivalent less than 20% of the rural man's vote.

Such arrangement gives a very heavy weightage to rural voters, which also consist makes up mainly of certain ethnic communities. Rural areas have the lowest number of voters. Consequently, political power in Sarawak rest with the rural seats and these communities.

The original intention for the differential in weightage was spelt out in the 1957 Constitution - having regard to the greater difficulty of reaching electors in the country districts and other disadvantages facing rural constituencies. The reason is based on the accessibility and geographical disadvantage of rural constituency. This states why the rural area needs more representatives (hence lower voters).

Simply put, it means the wider and more remote geographical area of the rural communities need more attention and needed more fund for development.

This is true for certain seats like in Ba'Kelalan, Telang Usan and Belaga. This is not the case for coastal area seats. For example, the size of the new seat N24 Gedong (6,340) is about the size of the new seat N13 Batu Kitang (20,107). Yet, the voters of these seats have vastly different rights. A voter of Gedong has one vote but his or her counterpart at Batu Kitang effectively has only 32% of the Gedong's vote. Pelawan voters are only 20% of Gedong voters.

This reasoning has its weaknesses. First, funding for the development of the rural area does not necessarily has to go in line with the number of elected representatives. It is a matter of planning

and budgeting. In fact many of the so-called rural seats are now well developed and has all the basic utilities and infrastructure. The development of our state has moved on for the last 52 years from 1962 when the constitution was first amended.

Second, many rural dwellers have moved to urban areas and maintain a nominal address and home at their villages or longhouses. The rural – urban migration is not only very real but is gathering pace. This is putting a big stress on the urban infrastructure such as housing, transport, education and health care. On the contrary, the reverse is true – it is the urban areas that need the most funding to improve and increase the infrastructure to cater for the ever-increasing number of rural-urban migrants. Without a large increase in funding for the urban area, the rural folks are the one who are most disadvantaged, as they can't rely on public facilities (which is starved of public funding) when they are already hard up. Housing and transportation are the most obvious.

Third, all the seats that have high voters are urban based. Urban voters are most educated, trained and exposed. It is a great source of human talents and leaders. By giving urban voters more representatives who will most likely be more educated and trained, will directly benefit the whole state. The quality of elected representatives will definitely improve.

Fourth, there is a perception of discrimination against certain ethnic community in favour of others. The figures show that except for one seat, all the 13 seats with more than 20,000 voters are Chinese majority seats. All the Chinese majority seats have more than the average number of voters. This paints the picture that the system discriminates against this community. This lead to resentment by this community as they see this as unfair.