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We'll be watching you!

Anita Anandarajah; Debra Chong

YOU'RE only 17, so you won't be among those casting their votes on March 21. But in five years, which candidate or party would you vote for and why? ANITA ANANDARAJAH and DEBRA CHONG spoke to 17-year-olds to get an idea of issues that are close to their heart.

"OUT with the school uniform. Let us express creativity in our dressing. We should be able to wear what we want - whether casual, trendy or preppy clothes.

"And we won't have to worry about the rich kids showing up on the less well-to-do. We can shop for bargains at thrift shops and create a whole new look.

"I also worry that I may not be able to get into a local university. While I do understand that there is a reason for the implementation of the quota system, it should be fair to all - whether in schools or at the workplace. We should be colour blind.

"Many of us apply to private colleges or go abroad to further our studies because we know that we don't stand a chance in local universities. So, the Government who implements the merit system will definitely get my vote". - Lavanya Jeevaraj, Perak

"WHAT about setting up an organisation made up of youths - people aged between 13 and 24 - to act as a consultative body to the Government? There are projects that could have been better executed if young people had been consulted. National Service is a good example. Most of us would prefer to have NS over a shorter period of time.

"Find out what we want. Usually, it isn't much. I'd like to see more venues for action sports. What about a skateboarding park in Terengganu? It's a healthy way to let off steam and we can also meet like-minded people in a safe, open space.

"But here's something I'd really like the new Government to do for us. Introduce roadshows or activities to expose us to the election. I would like to be a part of it and understand what everyone is getting excited about. Learning how Parliament functions in the textbook bores me to tears. But seeing it 'live' is a different ballgame. Help us understand, get us interested and then you may get our vote." - Nur Hasanah Mazalan, Terengganu

"REVAMP the education system. It's currently too exam-oriented. All we do is memorise information. Look at Moral Studies. We have to memorise 'useful' values. Where's the practical use? We read of young Malaysians committing robbery, rape and murder. They went through the same education system. They studied Moral and attended agama classes. Do you think they were applying anything they learnt from those subjects?

"One of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's aspirations is to produce a Malaysian Nobel Prize winner in the science field. To achieve this, we should be allowed to be creative and encouraged to think out of the box. One way is to introduce a variety of subjects and allow us to choose that which interests us. Then, we can develop skills in our field of interest from a young age.

"You'll get my vote if you can elevate our country's status in the field of education." - Jaganraj Ramachandran, Pahang

"I WOULD like to see the ruling party truly encourage greater racial and religious understanding among citizens. The 'racial and religious harmony' we have now is more 'tolerance'. There is a lack of true understanding of

each race's customs and beliefs. We need to emphasise equality.

"There is also a need for more concerted efforts in cracking down on crimes against women - rape, molest cases, domestic violence and even snatch thefts. The Government could be more pro-active in raising awareness of women's rights. They should also increase security through more police patrols and even by improving street lighting.

"We need to encourage the local arts scene more. Many local artistes experience great difficulty in getting international recognition due to a lack of government financial support. More importantly though, they suffer from tight censorship on what is considered 'tasteful' or 'politically correct'." - Victoria Ong, Johor

"I'M disappointed with the present State Government. Look at Seremban, it's nowhere near as developed as the other states. There have been empty promises over the past year - the international-level stadium in Paroi and a bowling centre for the coming Sukma Games never materialised. The Games is two months away, yet there's still no sign of work starting on the stadium. What a joke.

"Do something about that. It's not just for the Games. Once that's over, the public will be able to enjoy international-level facilities. Show me what you can do for Seremban.

"I've also got a bone to pick with the double standards imposed on foreign music artistes. Have you seen Britney Spears' video Toxic? It's been shredded to pieces! Why? On the other hand, we have locally-produced music videos with girls prancing around in spaghetti-strap tops and tube tops. I'm not offended by their choice of costume but why the double standards? " - Hazimah Aminah Azman, Negri Sembilan

"I WOULD like the ruling party to give more credibility to the opinions of youths. Right now, whenever youths make a comment or observation, they are shot down as immature and naive.

"Even the youth wings of political parties suffer from this misconception. The Government says youths are the leaders of the future but they don't treat us as such.

"The Government should discourage the kiasu culture where we try to achieve irrelevant things like the largest mooncake, the longest satay line, the biggest concrete bird. They are a waste of money. "I understand these projects are to build patriotism in the rakyat. Well and good, but I think we should be encouraged to take pride in more practical and useful activities like building businesses for the disabled." - Goh Eu Jin, Selangor

"THE Government should review our education system, especially the way our national exams are being handled. There are some aspects which are totally irrelevant to our studies and a waste of time. For instance, we have to create a Moral folio for SPM. One of the components requires us to prove our belief in God, to fulfil the Rukun Negara principle of 'Kepercayaan kepada Tuhan'. How do we prove something like that? Do we take pictures of us praying? That is just too superficial and hypocritical." - Jamie Chang Su Lin, Perak

"I WANT the Government to provide better and more efficient public transport. It'd be great if they could have the bullet train which would save time, money and decrease air pollution and traffic jams.

"Very often, public buses just zoom by bus stops without stopping to pick up passengers. Imagine how frustrating and tiring it is to wait so long without getting a ride. Not everyone can afford cars.

"On top of that, these buses emit dirty, black fumes that pollute the air. I would like Malaysia to have a cleaner environment." - Michelle McGuire, Penang

"BRING international concerts to Kuching. Most of us can't afford to

spend hundreds of ringgit on a plane ticket (although there's AirAsia now) on top of the concert ticket price, which I'm sure will cost about RM100. I'd vote for the Government who can bring Weezer or Maroon 5 to Kuching! They're my favourite alternative bands and I'd do ANYTHING to see them on my turf.

"Oh, there also aren't any futsal courts in Kuching. I'm sure many teens here would be happy to see one here.

"I'd also like to see our virgin jungle preserved. I'm an avid trekker and spend a lot of time hiking through the jungle. In Sarawak, we're still fortunate to have plenty of virgin jungle. Come down hard on illegal loggers. If I see serious enforcement taking place, you'd get my vote." - Bryan Herbert, Sarawak

"I think it's sad if a student is unable to continue his studies just because he is poor. The Government should make need the deciding factor when awarding scholarships. I don't think it matters what his background is as long as he can study and wants to.

"Also, they need to provide facilities that work properly. The roads in my area are usually rosak. The Government should make sure that when they do something, they do it properly, not half-heartedly.

"It is important for the Government to ensure that our country is peaceful and free from corruption. Make sure there is no element of money politics, especially during the elections." - Muhammad Zulhilmi Osman, Kedah

"DO us a favour and introduce junior clubs. These are like regular clubs where only youths between 11 and 17 can go party. Junior clubs will be a safe outlet as there won't be any alcohol served. Also, no one above 18 is allowed, thus no sleazy characters pushing drugs. Opening hours can be from 9pm to midnight. All we want is to hang out with friends and dance to good music.

"Futsal is gaining quite a following here. Malaysia participated in the Asian Football Confederation's futsal tournament in Jakarta last October but we lost 17-0 to Iran. I want the new Government to introduce training programmes in schools to encourage more student participation. Organise competitions at state and national level to select talented players. Build more futsal courts. Right now, rental for these courts is as high as RM100 per hour. How can students afford it? " - Chuman Dev Chandra Bose, Kuala Lumpur

"THE Government needs to enforce its policies on conservation and preservation, especially the rainforest. They need to control the chopping down of trees.

"Instead they should plant more big, shady trees, especially by the roadside in town, like in Singapore. The small, flowering bushes we have now to beautify the landscape are very nice and pretty but are not very practical.

"They also need to educate the public on recycling. We have recycling bins yes, but when you do see them, they're usually overflowing with all kinds of rubbish. Clearly the Government needs to teach the public how to separate waste. What we also need are more recycling bins located in public and strategic places, especially in housing areas. People are not that willing to walk very far just to throw a couple of empty cola cans. - Cornelia Wong, Malacca

"THE Government should make entry into local universities be wholly based on merit. I don't think anyone would be happy to learn that they got in just to fill up some quota instead of on how hard they've worked for it. I know I won't.

"They shouldn't have National Service either. How is it going to help if all we do is march around and learn History all over again? I think

patriotism can be instilled in other more practical ways.

"It would be great if the Government would allow more international artistes to have concerts here without much restrictions. I think we're mature enough at our age to decide what to follow and what not to." -  
Josephine Tan, Penang