

Campaign launched to back 'green reps' in next GE
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By Aidila Razak

What started as a group of concerned citizens afraid of losing their neighbourhood green lung in Kota Damansara about a decade ago, the NGO coalition Green Voters 2.0 has now bloomed into a movement to elect only 'green candidates' to legislative assemblies.

green voters 2.0 jeffrey phang holding poster "We were fighting to keep the Kota Damansara forest for six years and no one listened. So when 2008 came we told people we are not only residents but also voters, and we made MP and Adun (candidates) sign a pledge that they will help gazette our forest (if elected)," said coordinator Jeffrey Phang (right).

One candidate who had signed the pledge was PKR's R Sivarasa, and the MP has kept his pledge so that today the Kota Damansara forest is gazetted as a forest reserve.

It is this Kota Damansara phenomenon, said Phang, that Green Voters 2.0 is hoping to emulate across the nation.

Launching the campaign today in Damansara, Phang said the group will work with the communities to get all election candidates to sign similar pledges.

The group is backed by NGOs, the People's Green Coalition, Friends of Kota Damansara, Empower, Komas, Suaram, Centre for Independent Journalism and the Kuala Lumpur-Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall and the Bar Council. green voters launch

"What is happening in Malaysia is disastrous. We should be moving from a knowledge economy to a green economy but we are moving to a dirty economy by taking other people's waste...and this terrible state will continue unless we work together as green voters," he said.

According to Phang, since they set up their website recently other NGOs like Trees, that is working to save the Ampang forests, and the Malaysian Nature Society have come on board in their initial stages to build capacity among community leaders to educate voters in their respective constituencies.

"We will go to each constituency and enable voter committees who will move to get candidates to sign the pledge," he said.

Turning citizens into activists

Phang added that the pledge will include demands for local government election within the first year of election and a freedom of information bill.

"We want a freedom of information bill at the federal level because we found it very difficult to solve our problems (in Kota Damansara) because of lack of information," he said.

jeffrey phang green voters 2.0 Green Voters 2.0 will also be seeking candidates to pledge that they will enable local participation through adopting Local Agenda 21, first conceived at the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit.

Candidates are also urged to pledge that he or she will back a move towards a green economy through

rejection of 'dirty industries' and nuclear energy, and adoption of renewable energy.

"The other demands are community-specific, for example in Kuantan they may want to put into the pledge a rejection of rare earth refineries," he said.

Phang said that it cannot yet move to get pledges from candidates as it is not yet known who will be contesting in the 13th general election, and as such will first collate information on the attitude and practices of incumbents pertaining to the environment.

Green Voters 2.0 will also travel with the Komax Freedom Film Fest currently in Kuala Lumpur, that will proceed to Penang, Perak, Johor and Sarawak throughout October.

anti lynas bukit perlindungan solidarity walk 260611 anti lynas bannerPrior to the launch today, the Freedom Film Fest screened Oily Hair, a short documentary by filmmaker Indrani Kopal on the US gulf oil spill and Countdown to a Toxic Future by Jonathan Wong and Raymond Lim, that looks at the Kuantan community's concerns over the Lynas rare earth refinery in their vicinity.

Speaking after the screening, Lim, who sported a Save Malaysia Stop Lynas group T-shirt, said that he was recently asked how he had become an activist.

"I told them I am just an ordinary grandfather, but taking part in the movement against Lynas has turned me into an activist," said the middle-aged man.

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