

Give youngsters a crack at the reins, says PKR rep
The Malaysian Insider
October 02, 2011
By Yow Hong Chieh

SHAH ALAM, Oct 2 — Political parties must get more youths into key national posts to keep a finger on the pulse of the crucial voter segment, Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad said today, even as the competition intensifies for the affections of Malaysian youngsters.

The PKR communications director said it was critical for parties to include youths — who were more in tune with today's rapidly evolving society — in the decision-making process to ensure they remained in step with young voters' ever-changing demands.

"If you do not get the input of the young generation, then the leadership will be left out," he told reporters at Shah Alam Convention Centre here after launching his latest book, "Coming of Age".

Political parties are scrambling to get some four million eligible voters on the electoral roll, most of whom are young Malaysians who have yet to register after turning 21, ahead of possible snap polls early next year.

This is on top of two million Malaysians who have registered and will be voting for the first time in the next election.

Analysts predict that, by then, 25 to 30 per cent of voters will be below the age of 35.

The prime minister has gone on a charm offensive in a bid to connect with young voters, most recently hiring political strategists to reinvent his image as a "cool" moderate reformist as he prepares to lead Barisan Nasional (BN) to elections for the first time.

Nik Nazmi also lamented the exclusion of young, capable members from top posts in parties because senior leaders did not see them as adults and blamed this restriction for the widespread "Mat Rempit style of politics" exhibited by youth wings.

"Today, you have the youth wing wanting to burn buildings, to act as cheerleaders or as gangsters," the 29-year-old said.

PKR had lodged a police report in June claiming some 300 Umno Youth members had threatened to burn down its headquarters for supporting the July 9 Bersih rally.

The Seri Setia assemblyman said the young had once played a bigger role in national politics, explaining that it was youths who formed Kesatuan Melayu Muda (KMM) — Malaya's first political party — and Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (PKMM) during the pre-World War II colonial era.

He also pointed out that former prime minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein was just 29 when he was elected deputy president of Umno and was only 35 when he became Malaysia's first deputy prime minister.

The average age of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's Cabinet is 59, compared to the

thirty-somethings who made up the first Cabinet.

Singling out BN, Nik Nazmi added that political parties should only field young candidates who had proven their worth and not because it was the "sexy or trendy" thing to do.

"It has to be based on real talent or capacity, not just a quota for youths. This quota thing must be based on meritocracy. If the young person is equipped, then fine," he said.

The Malaysian Insider

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