

## **Independent-minded youth a swing factor in GE13**

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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 17 — Young adults who comprise a large proportion of newly-registered voters are concerned over the direction the country is heading in and are becoming more demanding and more politically-independent than their older counterparts.

Some analyst reports have estimated the number of new registered voters could exceed three million by March next year, which amounts to nearly a quarter of the current total voter base of about 12.4 million.

There was an explosion in registrations during 2010, some 820,156 or three times the 276,621 registered in 2009, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz told Parliament last October.

The huge increase in new voters is significant given the narrow margin of victory of the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition in 2008 — just 384,688 votes out of total of 8.16 million votes cast.

Malaysia has a total population of 28 million people, based on last year's census report.

Datuk Seri Najib Razak, who took over as prime minister in April 2009, will be leading the BN to seek a fresh mandate in the 13th general elections, which must be called before May next year.

Young working adults told The Malaysian Insider that they rarely felt close to any political party but would vote for good governance and those who were qualified to serve.

It suggested that a new mindset was emerging among young voters where political affiliations mattered less than leaders who could deliver on issues such as transparency, corruption and economic well being.

Recent graduate and voter, Ahmad Syafiq, 23, said that he was concerned that the government isn't doing enough to tackle the corruption that is affecting Malaysia's competitiveness as an economy in the present and future.

"I'm more inclined towards the opposition, but that won't stop me from supporting whatever good policies that is introduced by the current government," said Ahmad. "The most important thing at the end of the day would be to see our country progress to greater heights regardless of who is our current government."

Joshua Teh, a 25-year-old lawyer who hails from Penang, said he is a registered voter in the parliamentary constituency of Bukit Gelugor and will vote for the first time in the next general election.

"I believe that every vote counts. But I am on the fence. I do not like the fact that some political parties say you need to vote to 'bring change.'

"What does that mean? Some of them say you need to vote 'just to kick that other person out.' Is that reason enough to vote for someone?" asked Teh, who said he will vote for a party that can best "represent" his interests.

A 24-year-old cook in Sekichan, who wanted to be known only as Yanti, said she has been an Umno loyalist ever since she was in secondary school.

She told The Malaysian Insider that the reason she supported Umno and BN was because she believed that the coalition would be the best choice in protecting her rights and interests.

"I registered last year, this will be my first time voting. Rugi kalau tak undi (it would be a shame if I didn't vote) Najib is a good leader. This country has always been ruled by Umno, BN and it should continue that way," she said.

But she also admitted that the DAP and the Pakatan Rakyat state government have done their part to develop the area in which she lived.

"This is a Chinese area, DAP makes sure there is progress, development."

Azlee Mohd Nur, 25, a private-sector worker who lives in Shah Alam, said that he would vote for anyone who was sensitive to the problems of the constituents and was a hard worker.

"The leader I will vote for is the one that works hard all the time and not only when it is time for elections," he said. "And one who will get close to the constituents to solve their problems."

Wan Djawad said that despite whatever he saw or read in the media, he still wants to figure things out for himself.

"Media plays an integral role in shaping our thoughts and actions for or against a political party or movement, but I try to keep it balanced by figuring out for myself, why this and not that," said Wan.

Azlee wants a leader who is always on the clock.

Smitha T. Singam, another recent graduate and newly registered voter, said she felt that none of the political parties have truly shown that they work for the interest of the people and seemed more vested in their respective agendas.

"My vote is for whichever party that can bring about even a glimpse of positive change to Malaysia," she said.

Some young adults simply expressed frustration with the status quo and were itching for a change.

Syafiq, 23, an accountant who lives in Setiawangsa, KL said BN's 55-year unbroken grip on power was not healthy.

"I am planning to vote and my vote is for democracy," said the young man who declined to give his full name. "I see Malaysia as not democratic because the government has never lost."

Ibrahim Suffian, head of opinion research firm Merdeka Center, said that young voters

today tend to be less pro-establishment than previous generations.

"The young voters will be significantly less predictable than previous years," he said.  
"Whoever can convince them that they can take care of their interests will be able to tip the scales of the election."

Wan Saiful Wan Jan, chief executive of think-tank Institute of Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS), said younger voters were evidently concerned over what was happening in the country.

"They are clearly looking for better governance in the country," he said.

Patrick Chay, 24, from Petaling Jaya concurred saying that he was going to vote for what he felt was best for the country.

"I will be voting for righteousness," said Chay who works for a multinational company in the oil and gas industry. "I will be looking at whichever political party can better represent the future of Malaysia."

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