

200 square off in Youth Parliament
New Straits Times
11 May, 2012

KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysian Youth Parliament (PBM) is set to redefine the way the country moves forward as more young people are eager to be involved in the country's decision-making process.

PBM got its first trial session underway yesterday, with some 200 youth members of parliament squaring off in a tense but healthy debate on a range of current issues including LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) and education policies.

"Prime Minister" Ahmad Yakqub Nazri said he sensed a lot of "passion and energy" from the youth MPs, as if they were in an actual parliamentary debate.

"PBM allows us to come together to exchange and share ideas, and is an ideal platform to discuss issues specifically relevant to the youth," he told the New Straits Times.

Ahmad Yakqub said the biggest challenge possibly faced by youths today was getting their voices heard.

"We want the government to go to the grassroots and see the actual mobilisation of youth, whether they're students, drop-outs, skilled or unskilled workers."

He also urged Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak to entrust youth representatives with positions in government departments and government-linked companies.

"Give us the responsibility to hold high positions in the state or federal government and allow us to be part of the decision-making process."

Ahmad Yakqub said the youth parliament introduced by the Ministry of Youth and Sports was a significant step forward, as it served as a precursor to greater involvement by youth in the country's affairs.

Tai Zee How, 24, (Alor Gajah Youth MP), in sharing Ahmad Yakqub sentiments, urged the government to provide them de-facto power at the youth parliamentary level.

"It will be highly beneficial to see a youth equivalent of the Federal Government where we are allowed to debate youth-specific issues without influence from the government or opposition of the day."

Tai said it was important for the youth parliament to be non-partisan to avoid their issues from being politicised. He also suggested that the representatives be selected on the basis of their profession and not their constituencies.

"A youth from one constituency may not represent the concerns of all youths in that area as the issues are wide and far encompassing."

Noreen Effendi (Bentong Youth MP), 28, said PBM provided input to the government on the concerns of youth, as well as how it differed from society's concerns.

"Being here has created an awareness among most of us and the input provided by everyone has also been constructive."

Noreen, one of the more vocal MPs during the morning session yesterday, said PBM would also help develop a healthy culture of parliamentary proceedings.

"We are all friends and the standing order we learnt here is to respect one another, no matter what."

The PBM trial run, which ends today, is part of the government's transformation initiative under the Youth Development Transformation Lab during the end of 2010.

Its full execution next year will see representatives elected through online nomination and voting.

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