

Another ex-military officer joins PAS, vows to ensure two-party system
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By Syed Jaymal Zahiid

KUALA LUMPUR, April 25 — Datuk Ismail Saimon, a former top-ranking military officer who later helmed Universiti Pertahanan Malaysia, has joined PAS in a move the Islamist party believes would help bolster its campaign for support from the security forces.

The sizeable number of votes from the armed forces would be crucial to Pakatan Rakyat's (PR) push for federal power and the pact had been busy recruiting retired army and police officers into its ranks, hoping that their presence could help make a dent on Barisan Nasional's traditional vote bank.

"Looking at the current political situation, there is a need for change and it must first come from yourself, family and friends.

"I was never active in politics... there is no such thing as being apolitical," said Ismail, who retired as a Lt-General from the Malaysian Royal Air Force and was a former vice-chancellor of Universiti Pertahanan Malaysia, at the PAS headquarters here today.

Ismail said his decision to join PAS was to help the PR alliance persuade military voters against backing a government that has failed to protect the welfare of army personnel.

Ex-military officers now with PR have claimed low-ranking army personnel live in "abject" conditions, often struggling with meagre salaries while most live in poor housing.

The issue has driven PR's campaign in the military barracks, or at least close to them, since the Election Commission (EC) claims canvassing votes in the camps is prohibited by the army.

Ismail said his experience with army corruption was a major factor behind the woes facing military personnel.

He added that only by changing the BN government can the longstanding problems afflicting the military be addressed.

"I am for the two-party system. If there is a monopoly in politics then one will be completely immune, it cannot be criticised," he said in reference to BN's 55-year rule.

"So we must change this government," he added.

PR has said it has set its sights on some 250,000 voters living in police barracks and military camps nationwide and hopes to capitalise on the influence of former military personnel who have joined its ranks.

The military vote has often been a traditional support base for the ruling BN, and despite the PKR push BN politicians and pundits do not expect a major change in voting patterns in GE13, given that much funds are being spent on upgrading camps and welfare schemes for military personnel.

Ismail, however, claimed most of his former colleagues in the military fully support his campaign to garner support for the opposition and its promise to uplift the standard of living

within the military.

"They have given their blessing. They fully support me. Maybe the military will be with us," he said.

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