

Malaysians no longer scared to talk politics openly, says analyst
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by Hasbullah Awang Chik

Memo to political parties: Malaysians are no longer inhibited when discussing politics and it is not only Chinese voters who are demanding change.

Indeed, GE13 showed that the push for change was colour-blind and not only limited to urban centres. These observations were made by political analyst Bridget Welsh at a post election seminar organised by the International Islamic University.

Welsh, an associate professor in political science at the Singapore Management University, has spent the last few years working the ground in Malaysia, and has built a reputation as a credible pundit on local politics.

The May 5 general elections was keenly-contested and Barisan Nasional won 133 of the 222 parliamentary seats, short of its target of regaining two-thirds control of Parliament.

Since then, there has been no shortage of theories on what happened at the polls and the pattern of voting, with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak blaming the Chinese for his inability to meet his benchmark target of two-thirds majority of seats.

Welsh said that her research showed: "It is not only the Chinese who are demanding change in the general election but other races as well making the same demand whether in the urban or rural areas."

The recent polls also showed that Malaysians had lost the fear factor, she said. Once, the slew of laws and threats used to make people guarded over comments made in public. Not anymore.

"Malaysians have a strong interest in politics as I have observed many discussing various political issues daily."

"The fear that used to be in the hearts of Malaysians seems to have evaporated as they are now quite knowledgeable when talking about political issues, " said Welsh.

Meanwhile, political analyst Professor Datuk Seri Dr Syed Arabi Syed Abdullah noted that Barisan Nasional's performance was getting from bad to worse.

"This is the second consecutive term in which BN has failed to win by a two-thirds majority.

"Voters are aware now that BN is not their only choice as they can also evaluate the merits of voting for PR based on the results of the general election."

"Pakatan Rakyat has been successful in tackling crime and corruption issues while BN has not done much on the same issues," Syed Arabi added. - July 7, 2013

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