

'Protection of ethnic interests still a significant issue in GE14'

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KUALA LUMPUR: Besides the well-being of the national economy, leadership quality and good governance, Malaysian voters in the upcoming general election will undoubtedly put weight on how well political parties can protect the interests of the respective ethnic and cultural communities, said Merdeka Center director Ibrahim Suffian.

"The political structure of Malaysia is still driven by communal and ethnic-based parties. We are not about to move away from that, simply because the structure of the political system and the way the economic spoils of the country are divided by communal lines," Ibrahim said at the Affin Hwang Capital Conference yesterday.

"People look at the political parties that are contesting in terms of how well will they represent the interest of the voters, [specifically] the communal interest of the voters," Ibrahim said during a panel discussion.

Apart from that, the panellists agree that the top priority issue surrounding the upcoming general election is mainly the rising costs of living that are affecting Malaysian voters across racial and socioeconomic lines.

"Going into the upcoming election, I think two specific economic-related factors will influence the results; number one is the progressive rationalisation of subsidies that we have seen over the last couple of years, and second is the introduction of GST (goods and services tax), both of which have immensely affected the general popularity of the current government," Ibrahim said.

Another panellist, Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs chief executive Wan Saiful Wan Jan, said that considering the polling numbers and analysts' views leading up

to the general election, it will be relatively easy for the incumbent government to stay in power, at least at the federal level.

“I think the numbers are quite healthy for Barisan Nasional (BN) ... I would say at the federal government level, it looks quite certain for BN to win,” he said.

However, Wan Saiful did not completely dismiss the other possibility as polling numbers can never truly anticipate voters’ behaviour, as evident in the US presidential election between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump.

He added that the uncertainty for BN on a state level is the stumbling block that is preventing the general election to be called any time soon, “at least not until early next year”.

“A precedent has now been set [within BN] that winning Putrajaya alone is not enough, you must not lose additional states, and it will be much better if you can win more states.”

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