

Young people to strengthen democracy in Malaysia - Mahathir

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KUALA LUMPUR, July 16 (Bernama) -- Young people will strengthen democracy in Malaysia with their energy and intellect when they are given the opportunity, space and voice to join hands in shaping the nation through the elections, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said that it is for this reason that the government proposes for Malaysia to lower to 18 years the age of eligibility to vote and to be an electoral candidate. He was tabling the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2019 for second reading in the Dewan Rakyat.

Dr Mahathir said that, in general, the political awareness among youths has increased, with their looking forward in terms of thinking and maturity in line with the progress of the country.

“These people are exposed to extensive information, mass media influence and advancement of information technology, which make them smart, mature in their thinking, self-reliant and more informed.

“The government now believes they can balance the need to acquire knowledge and skills with political awareness and responsibility to carve a brighter future for the country,” he said, adding that this is in line with the government desire to create responsible citizens.

Besides reducing the voting age and age limit for election candidates to 18 years, the amendments to the Federal Constitution also proposed that they be automatically registered as voters by the Election Commission (EC).

Dr Mahathir said if the amendments were approved, the government expected 7.8 million new voters would be included into the electoral roll every year until 2023.

The government anticipated the number of voters in 2023 to increase by more than 50 per cent raising the total to about 22.7 million, compared with 14.9 million in the 14th General Election last year.

The Prime Minister said that since the transition of government in May last year, the country continued to be peaceful and stable enabling the amendment and abolition of oppressing laws to be implemented.

"I urge that we ensure the approval of the amendments by giving the majority support or more than two-thirds and create a new Malaysian history," said Dr Mahathir who appealed for the support of the 222 Members of Parliament.

Dr Mahathir said the government welcomed the suggestion by the opposition block which agreed that youths aged 18 should not only be given the right to vote but also to become electoral candidates and the commitment of the opposition block previously to support the amendment.

The Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2019 to lower the age of eligibility to vote and to be an electoral candidate to 18 years was tabled for the first time on July 4 before withdrawing it on July 10 to insert the amendment concerning the automatic registration of voters and reducing the age limit for electoral candidates.

The Prime Minister said to implement and enforce the amendment concerned, several amendments to the Election Offences Act 1954 (Act 5), Elections (Conduct of Elections) Regulations 1981 and Elections (Registration of Electors) Regulations 2002 must be made.

In addition, to enable the reduction of the age limit for candidates for the State Legislative Assembly to be implemented, the state governments were urged to amend several provisions in the respective State Constitution or Laws on the Formation of the State Government.

"This august house urges and is fully confident that the state government will support this amendment and will also amend the related provisions.

"As such, I call on all Honourable Members in this august house to realise together our intention to give an opportunity to the young generation to contribute energy and ideas to empower the country's democracy," he said.

At the moment, only Malaysia and Singapore in ASEAN and several other countries such as Samoa, Tonga, Cameroon, Kuwait, Oman and Lebanon are still maintaining the voting age limit to 21 while several countries in Europe had already begun reducing the voting age limit from 18 to 16 years such as Austria and Scotland.

"Following the developments worldwide, the youths in Malaysia were encouraged to be given the right to vote as early as 18 years old," he added.

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