

Youth have a bigger voice with reduced voting age

31 /07/2019

KUALA LUMPUR, July 31 (Bernama) -- The younger generation will have a bigger voice, given the historic passing of amendments to the Federal Constitution on July 16, allowing 18 to 20-year-old Malaysians to vote and stand for elections.

Muhammad Azril Aznan, 18, from Shah Alam, Selangor who is a temporary worker at a bookshop, firmly believes this, telling Bernama recently that the amendments were "a very positive development because the government will surely take our needs and wishes into account when making policies".

The amendment received the support of 211 parliamentarians, surpassing the two thirds majority needed, while Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Liew Vui Keong had said when presenting the bill to parliament, that the change was in line with democratic practices in other countries such as the United Kingdom and Germany which had also reduced the voting age to 18.

Nuraifana Ariffin, 19, from Kuala Lumpur, who has not had the opportunity to further her studies after completing the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia examination, and believes many other youngsters are in the same boat, hopes the government will examine in detail the issues affecting young people "particularly those of us who are starting a new phase of life between 18 and 20".

To public university student Goh Xia Yen, 20, from Ipoh, Perak, the recent change will enable the intellect of the youth to expand and mature, adding that "voting for a leader is not a trivial matter...so the youth will now be prompted to think more critically about all aspects of nationalism".

M. Chandran Raul, 19, a vocational college student in Melaka, believes youngsters now have plenty of opportunity to involve themselves in politics as they are eligible to stand for election as candidates.

"It can't be denied that young people are optimistic and full of fresh ideas...so this is the time

to combine our voices for the country's future", he said.

Twins Johan Ahmad Khair and Jefrizan Ahmad Khair, 25, from Seremban, Negeri Sembilan, believe the political landscape in the country will be broadened and gain maturity, with the involvement of youth aged 18 to 20 in the electoral process, compared to the minimum voting age of 21 previously.

They voted for the first time in the last general election in May last year but remember that as youngsters at 18, they too were questioning the fact that they were not allowed to vote.

Universiti Malaya sociopolitical analyst Prof Dr Awang Azman Awang Pawi said the reduction of the voting age was the initial step in ensuring the participation of the younger generation in a democratic process that continues to strengthen, adding that it was also a reflection of a government that is seeking to ensure its policies are inclusive.

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