

# Year end not the right time to hold GE15, say experts

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Several quarters have expressed their concern over the possibility of the 15th general election (GE15) taking place in November or December, saying that the focus then should be on managing floods and mitigating their effects. - NSTP/NADIM BOKHARI

KUALA LUMPUR: Speculation of a year-end general election has sparked much debate over the timing which coincides with the annual floods.

Several quarters have expressed their concern over the possibility of the 15th general election (GE15) taking place in November or December, saying that the focus then should be on managing floods and mitigating their effects.

The Malaysian Meteorological Department (MetMalaysia) has, in fact, forecast continuous heavy rain in the country from mid-November. According to MetMalaysia, the northeast monsoon that is active during that period can give rise to major floods.

Last year's year-end floods in Malaysia displaced an estimated 70,000 people and claimed over 50 lives, causing the nation to suffer economic losses of between RM5.3 billion and RM6.5 billion.

Whether or not the timing is appropriate, holding a general election during the rainy season is not new in Malaysia as GE10 took place in the month of November in 1999.

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Experts and political observers Bernama spoke to are not in favour of GE15 taking place at a time when floods are expected.

## **NOT APPROPRIATE**

Meteorologist Prof Datuk Azizan Abu Samah, for example, said the November 1999 election cannot be used as a reference due to the difference in the weather conditions then and now.

The major floods faced by Malaysia, including the ones in 2021, 2014 and 1971, were linked to the La Nina phenomenon, he said, adding that the ASEAN Specialised Meteorological Centre (ASMC), has predicted that the effects of La Nina and a negative Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) will bring above-normal rainfall in November this year.

As such, there is a high possibility of major floods occurring in Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang and Johor.

"In November 1999 (GE10), Malaysia was also influenced by La Nina but at that time, the Indian Ocean Dipole index was neutral, so the condition then was different compared to the (condition in the) 2021-2022 period.

"This means at that time (1999) the stimulus for above-normal rainfall was not as strong as it is now due to the simultaneous effects of La Nina and neutral IOD," he explained.

He added that besides ASMC, the Australian Meteorological Bureau and MetMalaysia have also forecast above-normal rainfall this November and December.

"In terms of the weather, I think February is a more suitable month for GE15," he told Bernama

## **NOT PREPARED YET**

Meanwhile, an expert in engineering geology and soil mechanics Dr Nor Shahidah Mohd Nazer said no election should be held during the rainy season as the ensuing floods would constitute a natural disaster that can cause untold hardship to the affected people.

"Not only are their homes submerged in water, but their cars, household items and possessions are also ruined by the floodwaters. Sometimes, there's even loss of life during a flood.

"When floods occur, the victims are more focused on flood management efforts and their woes, certainly not on other matters such as the general election," she told Bernama.

Nor Shahidah, who is a senior lecturer at the Department of Earth Sciences and Environment, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, opined that Malaysia is not fully prepared to deal with such natural disasters and even though various efforts have been made by the authorities toward this end, the government is still looking for effective flood-mitigation solutions.

She said a complete flood-mitigation plan must be put in place in order for the nation to be more prepared to deal with the annual floods.

Pointing to the flood-mitigation projects planned for high-density areas such as Kuala Lumpur and Shah Alam, she said they are still in various phases of implementation with some of the projects yet to take off.

She said Kuala Lumpur City Hall has also proposed to construct a high-capacity underground water storage tunnel as a long-term solution to address the problems posed by flash floods but that would take some time to materialise due to its gigantic scale.

"As of now, we have not reached the level (where the nation is fully prepared to deal with floods), so I would like to emphasise that it's best to avoid having an election during the flood season," she added.

## **AFFECT VOTER TURNOUT**

Political analyst Associate Prof Dr Jeniri Amir said having the general election during the rainy season will definitely have a negative impact on the percentage of votes cast on polling day.

"A high voter turnout percentage is necessary to get the mandate of the people," he said.

"On election day, we must ensure high voter turnout of at least 70 or 75 percent, not below 60 or 50 percent."

He believed that if GE15 takes place in the midst of floods in several states, it can have big implications from a demographic point of view because "those who come to vote will reflect the 'representative voice'... this is why we want more people to come out and vote".

He added that the government will also be saddled with a huge expenditure if GE15 is held in the midst of floods as it would have to make allocations for conducting the election as well as managing the floods and providing aid to the victims.

In January this year, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob allocated RM1.4 billion to be channelled as aid to the victims of the major floods that struck several states in December last year.

Jeniri said although a general election was held during the rainy season once in 1999 but based on records and data, it is clear that the authorities would try to avoid calling an election in November, December or even January.

"We must rely on the data, statistics and advice of MetMalaysia and EC (Election Commission) and should not risk having the election at a time when we are facing challenging weather conditions," he added.

He is, however, confident that the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah, prime minister and the EC will take careful consideration and seek the advice of the relevant agencies before deciding on the election date. – BERNAMA