

## **Student Activism and The 13<sup>th</sup> Malaysian General Election: The Second Civil Society Wave After 1969**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The 13<sup>th</sup> Malaysian General Election held on 5 May, 2013 witnessed the revival of the student movement in Malaysia. Civil society activism had been on the wane for more than 40 years as the student movement had been shackled by the Universities and College Universities Act or AUKU (*Akta Universiti dan Kolej Universiti*), which brought student movement activism under the control and subject of AUKU. The student movement managed to gain some latitude from AUKU in 2012 when it was amended, paving the way for students to participate more actively in the 2013 General Election. The true motive of the student movement was in fact not the gaining of political power, but to regain the universities' autonomy that had been lost in the 1970s. For this purpose the student movement, under their new organisation, *Gerakan Mahasiswa 13* (GM13), launched several street demonstrations to exert pressure on the ruling government. This movement launched its manifesto in order to bring the attention of the ruling government to its demands. In the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election, the student movement played two major roles: firstly acting as a pressure group and secondly, disseminating information.

*Keywords:* student movement, 13<sup>th</sup> Malaysian General Election, GM13, AUKU

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The student movement created some ripples after 2008 when it became one of the voices of civil society that sought to bring the government's attention to certain issues that were detrimental to the interests and well-being of Malaysians. Civil society can

be defined as that space that exists between the government and the common people (Edwards, 2004) and also as a community that consists of various non-government institutions that are strong enough to change the course of events within a country (Gellner, E). Student movement activism in Malaysia during the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election, which is seen as the second wave of student activism, after the first wave of the 1970s, is a particularly interesting subject of study because it started to voice opinions on issues representing university students' rights. The second wave of activism of 2013 managed to gain support from student movements entrenched in Islamic and socialist ideologies that were similar in philosophy and momentum as the student movement of the first wave that arose in the 1970s. After that first wave, the rights of university students as Malaysian citizens had been violated when AUKU placed several severe restrictions upon university students with regards to their participation in Malaysian politics. In order to regain their place as a meaningful component of the civil society movement in Malaysia, university students needed to free themselves from these restrictions and this they finally did during the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election when they underwent a period of revitalisation.

The first wave of their struggle in the 1970s demonstrated to the student movement that they could pressure the ruling government to revise its views on the future direction and destiny of Malaysians. In the lead-up to the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election, several issues were addressed by the student

movement in their manifesto including threats to national integration, increase in cost of living and haphazard national education policies; this largely reflected the struggle of the student movement in the first wave of student activism during the 1970s. Thus, it needs to be highlighted here that the core struggle of the student movement was to enable it to play effective and meaningful roles in the prevailing civil society movement in Malaysia, and not merely to gain more powers as student groups by seeking removal of restrictions to its activities. This paper utilises the idea of civil society to discuss student movement activism in the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election. The function of civil society is to be an agent of social change, either before or after the process of democratisation, in influencing the development and change of a political system (Hall, 1995). It appeared that the student movement was attempting to negotiate a space between the government and the common people; this, indeed, according to Edward Shills, is a role of civil society. . This movement basically strove to act as the voice of the silent majority. This study was analysed using secondary data derived from newspapers, namely Harakah Daily, Keadilan Daily, Utusan Malaysia and Malaysia Kini, books and journal articles.

#### *Student Movement in 1970 and 2013 as Civil Society*

The 13<sup>th</sup> Malaysian General Election was interesting because it witnessed a milestone in the student movement in Malaysia after the amendment of the Universities and

University Colleges Act 1971 (AUKU 1971) in 2012. AUKU 1971 was enacted by the government with the royal consent of the King, the Yang Di Pertuan Agong on 27 April, 1971. It was an act that came under the purview of the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education. This act had wide implications concerning the establishment, regulation, administration and other related matters pertaining to colleges and public universities such as the universities' constitution and law. This act was amended in 1975 and 1995, following which, it became known as the Universities and University Colleges (Amendment) Act 1995. However, in 2012, it was revised again, and this time, it provided greater flexibility that allowed for student activism.

AUKU has been instrumental in dismantling student activism in a number of ways. Firstly, it dissolved several active student organisations, when under the act, all student organisations no longer came under the Societies Act 1966. This meant that student organisations effectively lost their powers of autonomy. All student organisations were now supervised by the respective Vice Chancellors (VC), and AUKU gave the VCs the power to dissolve any student organisation that could, in their opinion be hazardous to the university, or in their judgment, was no longer active. One of the casualties of this act was the Universiti Malaya Socialist Club. AUKU also curbed student activism with the setting up of a Student Affairs Department in every university. Prior to the establishment of AUKU, student

activities were controlled directly by the University Council, and the autonomous power of organising students, which came directly from student unions, had given support, including financial backing, to the student movement. The establishment of Student Affairs Departments under AUKU, however, eliminated the student movement's self-sufficiency and made them dependent on the Student Affairs Departments for logistics, financial support and even the planning of their activities. In this way, AUKU had limited the participation of students in national politics. The section of AUKU on General Discipline in the Student Disciplinary Rules clearly prohibited student participation in off-campus activities; it is given as: "No student and no organization, body or group shall organize, conduct or participate in any off-campus activities...". Students could participate in off-campus activities only with written approval from the Vice Chancellor in advance, and approval was solely at the discretion of the Vice Chancellor. Other than that, AUKU had developed cleavage in the student movement whereby student activism was forced to be focused on university campuses only, as AUKU had prohibited university students from participating in off-campus political activities. In this way, university students usually ended up supporting a favoured group and were biased against others. Even though students participated in campus elections, they were not allowed to form parties or groups during campus elections as the universities prohibited students from competing in groups and candidates were

not allowed to use their own symbols. Rules and strict controls were imposed during campus election weeks, making students lose interest in participating in campus politics. Finally, AUKU stifled student activism by increasing competition among student bodies, by allowing more student bodies to be formed on campuses to create competition among student bodies to recruit new members. The strength and success of an organisation depends on the number of members it has and the solidarity found among them. However, university administration encouraged students to form numerous student associations and when there were too many associations, the student movement became fragmented and weakened (Junaidi Abu Bakar, 2008).

In 2009 an amendment was made to AUKU that allowed university students to participate in outside campus activities that related to Non-Government Organisations (NGO), but the student movement was not satisfied with the amendment so it kept pressurising the government until 2012, when the government had to abolish section 15 (1), (2) and (3) from AUKU, which gave university students the right to participate in politics freely outside campus compounds. The student movement gained influence and impetus in society because of several national issues such as the Hamid Tuah incident, the 13 May incident and the National Language issue. In the Hamid Tuah incident, the Selangor state government arrested Hamid Tuah and his followers after Hamid Tuah had developed a piece of land in Teluk Gong illegally;

before this Hamid Tuah and his followers had tried to settle down in Sungai Siput but they had been forced to move out. Their real intention had been to develop the land for farming. However, stemming from a speech at Speaker's Corner, Universiti Malaya students, under the leadership of Sanusi Osman, had pressured the Selangor state government, which resulted in Hamid Tuah and his followers finally being given a piece of land for agricultural purposes. Additionally, the Selangor state government also had to change its policy on the issue of distribution of land to the poor (Muhammad Abu Bakar, 1973). The May 13 incident of 1969 had shown how the student movement managed to pressure the first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, to resign from his post after he failed to control bloodshed between ethnic groups on 13 May, 1969. On that day, it was reported that Tunku had invited his friends for a poker game while Malaysians in many parts of the country were embroiled in bloodshed (Muhammad Abu Bakar, 1973). This situation caused the Universiti Malaya Malay Language Society (*Persatuan Bahasa Melayu Universiti Malaya*, PBMUM), one of the student movement bodies at that time, to pass a resolution urging Tunku to resign. Under the leadership of Syed Hamid Ali, an anti-Tunku demonstration was held on 28 August, 1969, and consequently, Tunku was forced to step down as Prime Minister on September 1970, after about a year of running battles with the student movement (Muhammad Abu Bakar, 1973). The National Language issue had brought the student movement

again in the national limelight when they managed to force Universiti Malaya (the only university in existence at that time) to enforce a strict policy of making Bahasa Melayu (the Malay language) the official language of the university. Even though Bahasa Melayu had been recognised in the constitution as the National Language, in Universiti Malaya, teaching sessions and all formal correspondence was still carried out in the English medium. This situation caused PBMUM under the leadership of Nordin Razak, with support from about 3000 students, to hold a demonstration called '*Demonstrasi Papan Tanda*' (The Signboard Demonstration). In this demonstration, all signboards, posters and bulletin boards in Universiti Malaya that were in English were defaced with red and black paint. In the end, Prof. Ungku Aziz as Vice Chancellor of Universiti Malaya, was forced to make it mandatory to use Bahasa Melayu in all academic and management affairs (Muhammad Abu Bakar, 1973).

This incident led by the student movement came with the support of the general public while the media gave sufficient coverage to the views of the student leaders. The stand of the student movement infused courage among some political leaders and public servants in the government sector to start criticising the actions of some national leaders such as Tunku Abdul Rahman, Datuk Harun Idris (Chief Minister of Selangor) and Prof Ungku Aziz for their stand favouring elitist viewpoints. This issue gained support from the general public when they too participated

in several demonstrations led by the student movement. The information gained from public speeches of student leaders to the public about issues and problems was also disseminated widely throughout the nation. Even though the student movement, in the first wave of its activities, had proved that it could change the decisions of the authorities, the students felt that the influence that they had gained was insufficient. This was the impetus that drove the student movement to participate actively in the 13<sup>th</sup> Malaysian General Election (Norshazura Mat Zuki & Ridauddin Daud, 1 March 2013). The onset of the 13<sup>th</sup> Malaysian General Election was historic because after 44 years (1969-2013), the student movement decided to participate in the General Elections again, and in no less a way than by challenging Malaysian Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Hj. Najib Tun Razak, himself for the parliamentary seat of Pekan, Pahang by fielding its own candidate. The reason the student movement, under their vehicle of *Gerakan Mahasiswa I3* (GM13), decided to participate in the 13<sup>th</sup> Malaysian General Election was because they wanted their demands on academic freedom to be heard by the ruling government.

The student movement made an attempt to participate in the general election to attract the attention of the ruling government to the issue of academic freedom that had been raised during the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election (2008) but at that time, student activism was limited due to the enforcement of AUKU. Also at that time, the student movement's vehicle was *Parti Mahasiswa Negara* (PMN), which was hardly vociferous as

an organisation. After 2008, the ruling government still found it hard to allow the student movement to join national politics; it tried to amend AUKU twice before the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election but that did not appease the student movement because it had not been given the autonomous power and academic freedom that it was seeking (Suhaimi, A., 11 February, 2013). Gerakan Mahasiswa 13 (GM13) picked Bukhairy Suffian as its candidate when it declared that it was participating in the 2013 general elections (Nazri, A., 5 April, 2013). However, two days before nomination day, GM13 suddenly declared that it was withdrawing on the grounds that the opposition coalition, *Pakatan Rakyat*, had agreed to accept their manifesto. GM13 had consulted with both political coalitions (*Pakatan Rakyat* and *Barisan Nasional*) before they had decided to participate in Malaysia's 13<sup>th</sup> General Election to further their struggle for academic freedom, but no response had been given by either political party. Subsequently, GM13 decided to participate in the general election without relying on any political party to support their struggle but two days before the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election, *Pakatan Rakyat* leaders, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Datuk Seri Tuan Guru Hj. Abdul Hadi Awang, decided to accept the GM13 manifesto in their general election campaign. GM13 also knew that it had virtually no chance of winning in its bid to contest in the general election, so it decided it would be wise to withdraw (Bukhairy Suffian, 22 April, 2013). The GM13 chairman, Safwan Anang, had said

that the party wanted to make way for *Pakatan Rakyat* and *Barisan Nasional* to have a one-on-one contest. Following this, GM13 decided to throw their support behind *Pakatan Rakyat* in the campaign for the parliamentary seat of Putrajaya (Hasbullah Awang Chik, 18 April, 2013). According to Bukhairy Suffian the reason they decided to cooperate with *Pakatan Rakyat* and not with *Barisan Nasional* was because *Pakatan Rakyat* and GM13 had similarities in their struggle for political reform in Malaysia, with the main difference being *Pakatan Rakyat* was working for political reform at national level while the student movement was working for political reform at university level. This was despite GM13 having had issues earlier with *Pakatan Rakyat* due to the suspension of five *Kolej Universiti Islam Insaniah (KUIN)* students in Kedah. This was because *Pakatan Rakyat* seemed to be more democratic in its politics compared to *Barisan Nasional* (Bukhairy Suffian, 22 April, 2013). In Putrajaya, GM13 supported Dato' Paduka Hj. Husam Musa as *Pakatan Rakyat* candidate because he had helped to deliver GM13's manifesto to *Pakatan Rakyat* leaders, which had finally led to its being accepted by the opposition coalition (*Selangor Kini*, 18 April, 2013). This was actually a very good publicity strategy by GM13. It knew that it could not win the Pekan parliament seat and so the party declared that it was fighting for that seat in order to generate public awareness for their views on the issue of higher education. The reforms championed by the student movement were stated in

their manifesto (*Polisi Baharu Pengajian Tinggi Negara, Ke Arah Universiti Yang Mandiri, Demokratik dan Berautonomi*). This document highlighted eight core policies that needed to be reformed, namely: human capital, adherence to the constitution, academic freedom, planning to popularise democracy, full autonomy of tertiary institutions, autonomy among university students, free education and equal rights.

This strategy had been employed in a 1989 by-election when the Universiti Malaya Student Union (UMSU) under the leadership of Shamsudin Moner had nominated their Vice President, Azmi Tajuddin, as candidate for the Bentong parliament seat. This act brought UMSU a great deal of news coverage from WATAN of its demands (Mohd. Shuhaimi Al-Maniri, 1995). The real intention of the student movement in participating in the elections of 1989 was to try to give the real picture about national politics by using a non-racial approach. UMSU had issued a manifesto called the Student Manifesto to propagate racism-free practices in national politics. Eradication of racism in this manifesto had been recognised by *Majlis Gerakan Negara* (MAGERAN) when they studied students' life in Universiti Malaya campus (Mohd. Safar Hasim, 1986).

#### *The Student Movement as a Pressure Group*

The role of the student movement as a pressure group to the establishment was triggered by poor living conditions of Malaysians, especially Malays, who were

perceived to have been abandoned by the establishment group. After 2008, the student movement had gone on the offensive with a new spirit on certain issues that affected the general well-being of Malaysians. One issue that highlighted the student movement as an important pressure group in Malaysia was *Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Sains dan Matematik Dalam Bahasa Inggeris* (PPSMI). The student movement under their vehicle, the National Islamic Students Association of Malaysia (*Persatuan Kebangsaan Pelajar Islam Malaysia*, PKPIM) had made an open declaration to reject the idea of PPSMI in order to empower *Bahasa Melayu* as the National Language. They also enlisted help from several NGOs (*Gerakan Mansuh PPSMI*) and public figures (A. Samad Said) and launched a street demonstration, marching from Masjid Negara to Istana Negara to deliver a memorandum to the *Yang Di Pertuan Agong*, asking the King to intervene in this issue to stop the ruling government from proceeding with the PPSMI in the national education system. This movement had many parallels with the '*Perarakan Keranda 152*' (Coffin Procession 152) held on 3 March, 1967, when the student movement of the day had taken to the streets to protest the Enactment Draft of the National Language (*Rang Undang-undang Bahasa Kebangsaan*) at Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (Jimadie Shah Othman & Abdul Rahim Sabri, 7 March, 2009).

There was another initiative from students acting as a pressure group in the Lynas issue regarding the decision of the ruling government to allow a multi-billion

corporation from Australia to operate a rare earth processing plant at Gebeng, Kuantan. The student movement championed this issue because there were several unresolved issues in China and Australia regarding rare earth processing that had made the student movement, as a component of civil society, to contend that this plant would endanger the health of Malaysians. The student movement, represented by several vehicles like *Persatuan Mahasiswa Islam* (PMI), *Mahasiswa Demokratik Malaysia* (DEMA), *Solidariti Mahasiswa Malaysia* (SMM), *Gerakan Mahasiswa Selamatkan Rakyat* (GMSR), *Aksi Mahasiswa Peduli* (AKSI) and *Kongres Gerakan Mahasiswa Pantai Timur* (GEMPUR) had agreed to participate in *Himpunan Hijau 2.0*, which turned out to be one of the biggest street demonstrations in Malaysia. It was held in several cities around Malaysia (Kuantan, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Ipoh and Kamunting) and involved 20,000 Malaysians who protested the government's decision to build a rare earth processing plant in Malaysia (Malaysia Kini, 19 May, 2011).

Another issue that led to the student movement's positioning of itself as a pressure group in Malaysia was the rising cost of living, especially after the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election. The ruling party, which had won the election, breached its promises regarding curbing costs of living and instead, increased the price of oil/gas, electricity, water, taxes and highway tolls. This prompted the student movement, under its vehicle, the Movement to Reduce the Cost of Living (*Gerakan Turun Kos Sara*

*Hidup [Turun]*) to call upon all Malaysians on 31 December, 2013 to take to the streets in protest against government decisions on this matter. This situation was the same as the issue that had been brought up by the student movement in the 1960s and 1970s when it became the voice of the rural people because the government had failed to control the increase of food prices and the decrease of rubber prices, badly affecting the living conditions of rural people (Kuala Lumpur Post, 24 December, 2013). The majority of Malaysians had been instrumental in creating a conducive spirit for student movements to be the voice of the proletariat. The students considered themselves as essentially crucial members of the community who had a valuable role to fulfil in society.

As individuals with the propensity to think rationally, their awareness of the hardship of the public become even keener when they realised that financial support for their education, which had been channelled by the government, actually came from taxpayers' money, and this shift of perception enabled them to feel more empathy for the masses. University students are equipped with knowledge and an inquiring spirit, and being introduced to a new sense of responsibility due to varsity culture and its attendant exposure, it was only natural for them to be sensitive to issues that burden society (Muhammad Abu Bakar, 1973). GM13, as a student movement engine in the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election, had played a major role as a pressure group to reform higher education

institutions by declaring their manifesto (*Polisi Baharu Pengajian Tinggi Negara, Ke Arah Universiti Yang Mandiri, Demokratik dan Berautonomi*). The major role of GM13 was to mobilise 13 student organisations in the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election, namely, *Gabungan Mahasiswa Islam Se-Malaysia* (GAMIS), *Solidariti Mahasiswa Malaysia* (SMM), *Aksi Mahasiswa Peduli* (AKSI), *Legasi Mahasiswa Progresif* (LMP), *Persatuan Mahasiswa Islam Universiti Malaya* (PMIUM), *Persatuan Mahasiswa Islam Universiti Putra Malaysia* (PMIUPM), *Demi Mahasiswa KUIS* (DMK), *Mahasiswa Keadilan Malaysia* (MKM), Watch 13, *Majlis Perwakilan Mahasiswa Nasional* (MPMN), *Pro-Mahasiswa Nasional* (Pro-MN), *Sinergi Gerakan Mahasiswa* (SIGMA) and Sisters In Movement (SIM). G M 1 3 successfully managed to gather 1000 university students for the *Perhimpunan Kebangkitan Rakyat* (People's Revival Assembly) on 12 January, 2013. This was a rally that saw the participation of almost 120,000 Malaysians to demand that: the rights of the poor and the marginalised be respected; national wealth lost through corruption be recovered; and the people of Sabah and Sarawak be given their just dues under the Malaysia Agreement, 1963. The organisers of the demonstration claimed that Sabah and Sarawak had not been treated fairly in social, economic and political issues compared to other states in Malaysia especially on the issue of petroleum royalty, which had been included in the 1963 Malaysia Agreement. They also provided 'Lori Mahasiswa' (University Students'

Lorry/Vehicle) to go around the university campuses in the Klang Valley and also all 13 states in Malaysia to spread the student agenda and inform Malaysians about all forms of oppression and injustice committed against students (Hazayani Zakaria, 3 January, 2013).

The student movement tried to bring reforms to higher education in their struggle, and this was the main objective of the GM13 manifesto in the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election. The Prime Minister in the 10th Malaysia Plan had spoken about revamping the nation's education system so that students produced by the university system would be of suitable calibre and would be employable. Higher education reform was seen as "the direction and empowerment of national education" so that the education system would be capable of lifting the potential of students to become more confident, have high morals and be able to compete globally" (Statement by Selangor PKR Youth chief as quoted in the Independent Review, 23 June, 2010). The way to achieve this, according to GM13, was to remove any government influence on university management, and Vice Chancellors were not to be chosen by the Higher Education Minister so that the executive head of the universities would not be bound by any external forces. The university management must also not prevent or restrain students from becoming involved in social affairs and politics and lastly, the government should ensure private colleges and universities were not established for the purpose of reaping monetary gains and maximising

profitability, but they should be geared towards producing students who were equipped with characteristics as expounded in the 10th Malaysia Plan (Ong Kian Ming, 18 April, 2013).

Essentially, the manifesto that had been produced by GM13 had been a proposal to revamp the higher education system. The essence of this policy goal was the redeeming and reforming of tertiary education in institutions of higher learning, and this included the introduction of proper general governance in the areas of academic as well as student affairs. The manifesto highlighted that changes in the tertiary education agenda must start with the formulation of a National Higher Education Act, which needed to contain elements of protection against new policies that were detrimental to higher education. This formulation should be followed by the repeal of the Universities and Colleges Act (174), the Institute of Private Higher Education Act (555), Education Institutions Act (174) and the Universiti Teknologi MARA Act (173). This tertiary education policy reform would contribute to the birth of autonomous institutions of higher learning. This autonomy would then rectify the structural relationship between institutions of higher learning and the Ministry of Higher Education (*Dokumen Polisi Baharu Pengajian Tinggi Negara* or the National Tertiary Education New Policy Document, 4 March, 2013). This document highlighted eight core policies that needed reform, namely, human capital, adherence to the constitution, academic freedom, planning

to popularise democracy, full autonomy of tertiary institutions, autonomy among university students, free education and equal rights (Nizam Zain, 5 March, 2013).

The reason why GM13 did not focus on economic and social issues in their manifesto, unlike what had been done by the National Union of Malaysian Students (NUMS), which was the student movement vehicle in the General Election of 1969, was that GM13 wanted to build a strong university student body on campuses before moving to the second phase, that is, nation building (Anis Nazri, 5 March, 2013). The problem with nation building in Malaysia is that the effort towards this noble aspiration does not seem to have started at the right level with the right people, thus necessitating university students to take on the mantle of true leadership, which the student movement saw as an ingredient that was sorely needed. University students do bear the moral responsibility in this regard as they are considered future leaders of the nation. Sadly, inherent weaknesses in the set-up of local universities do not allow students to have a meaningful, supportive network established among themselves. The AUKU, in no uncertain terms, prohibits student organisations from forming any form of network without permission from the Vice Chancellor. The ruling government managed to uphold unity among the races by implementing the ‘*Rukun Negara*’ and ‘*Dasar Ekonomi Baru*’ (New Economic Policy); lately, the Prime Minister renewed this policy by implementing the ‘*Model Ekonomi Baru*’ (New Economic Model).

The problem with the ruling government policy is that attempts at nation building seem superficial. A number of concepts embraced by the ruling government, such as the '*Konsep Ketuanan Melayu*' (Concept of Malays as Masters), were not accepted by GM13 as it wanted to build a new Malaysia with a new spirit of unity that is neither superficial nor ornamental, but which is tangible and can be manifested meaningfully in the daily lives of the people, rather than beheld up merely as an abstraction in the figment of propagandist imagination.

However, GM13 needed to have a strong underpinning of student movement before they could make this idea a reality. The problem with student movements at campuses is that they are split into several groups that have different ideologies. Although at first sight the proliferation of a large number of student organisations seems to augur well for the development of the student movement, in reality this produces fragmentation of the student population as students end up not speaking with one voice, and there seems to be discord among themselves. Even in their opinion of AUKU, where one would expect them to find a common voice or point of accord, there have been divided opinions, with some groups expressing strong opposition while others defend it. This is a fundamental problem that needs to be addressed by the student movement if they are to play a meaningful role in championing the rights of the common people who neither have the insight nor the congruency to express their dissatisfaction or to make themselves heard.

A policy of inclusiveness needs to be made a priority; the leanings of a particular group could be nationalist, socialist or Islamic, but the group needs to find common grounds wherein members share similar aspirations so that they can work as a team to achieve a greater good. The key point to note here is that they need to find grounds on which to agree rather than allow themselves to be led astray as each group tries to establish its own identity and starts pursuing goals that are too parochial and in the process, neglect the larger, more meaningful role that they are capable of playing in the genuine transformation of Malaysian society. At the root of this problem is the fact that a student organisation in a particular university is prohibited from establishing any form of contact with any external organisation – even with student organisations from local sister universities. This policy is akin to the 'divide and rule' policy that was used in the 1970s to curb campus politics, and that ultimately led to the weakening and disempowerment of student bodies. The president of GM13, Safwan Anang, challenged Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Hj. Najib Tun Razak, to debate issues highlighted in the GM13 manifesto, especially those pertaining to university autonomy and free education with GM13's representative. GM13 even went as far as sending an official open letter to the Prime Minister but no response was given (Mahasiswakini, 22 March, 2013). This act of GM13 added pressure on the establishment to admit that higher education institutions indeed needed to be reformed.

The ruling government chose not to respond to this idea when the Prime Minister shied away from facing GM13 in open debate even though he continued to defend government policies from the safe vantage of press statements. GM13 kept up their pressure on the establishment to admit the truth about the reality of higher education by organising street demonstrations in front of the Prime Minister's residence. The Prime Minister, as head of the ruling coalition, persisted in not agreeing to free higher education, and this stand was revealed by UMNO Youth Leader, Khairy Jamaluddin, in his debate with PKR Strategic Director, Rafizi Ramli, which clearly showed the stand of the *Barisan Nasional* government that free higher education would not be implemented in Malaysia (Pavinder, 15 April, 2012).

A movement needs attention from the public in order to gain support and that was what was strategically done by GM13. They launched street demonstrations in order to pressure the Prime Minister into accepting their challenge to a debate. In a protest gesture, GM13 also camped in front of *Radio Televisyen Malaysia* (RTM) headquarters (Safwan Anang, 21 March, 2013). The government reacted to this act of GM13 by holding three of their leaders in custody (Aedi Asri, 22 March, 2013). Many groups responded to this repressive action, and it is worthy of mention that many groups came out in open support of GM13; these included political parties (*Pemuda Parti Al-Islam SeMalaysia*), student organisations (*Gabungan Mahasiswa Islam Se-Malaysia*

[Gamis], *Solidariti Mahasiswa Malaysia* [SMM], *Aksi Mahasiswa Peduli* [Aksi], *Legasi Mahasiswa Progresif* [LMP], *Persatuan Mahasiswa Islam Universiti Malaya* [PMIUM], *Persatuan Mahasiswa Islam Universiti Putra Malaysia* [PMIUPM], *Demi Mahasiswa KUIS* [DMK], *Mahasiswa Keadilan Malaysia* [MKM], Watch 13, *Majlis Perwakilan Mahasiswa Nasional* [MPMN], *Pro-Mahasiswa Nasional* [Pro-MN], *Sinergi Gerakan Mahasiswi* [SIGMA] and Sisters In Movement [SIM]) and non-government organisations (*Suara Rakyat Malaysia* [SUARAM]). All these groups gave vocal support to GM13 by expressing opinions critical of the establishment and gave their sympathetic support to the student activists and their struggle. These initiatives represented a brilliant strategy by GM13 to win the views of the public towards their struggle. Such a strategy was used previously by the Universiti Malaya Student Union (UMSU) in August 1969, when several of their student leaders had been placed under custody after 1000 university students took to the streets in demonstrations for greater university autonomy. The demonstration gave UMSU greater clout when several international student unions like the Federation of United Kingdom and Eire Malaysian and Singapore Students' Organisation (FUEMSO), the London Union of Malaysian and Singapore Students (LUMSS) and the Malaysian and Singapore Students' Forum (MASS) came out in support of them and highlighted their struggle at the international level (Muhammad Abu Bakar, 1973).

It is believed that student movements rebel because of generational conflict (Feaur, 1969). Feaur was of the opinion that rebellion by student movements was fuelled by resentment of older generations represented by the government, university authorities or society in general. The younger generation that makes up the student movement seemed against what they perceived to be the negative values of the older generation (establishment group) whom they considered to be tainted, obsolete and irresponsible. Feaur considered student rebellion as a reaction springing in response to the actions of misguided relics of an older generation that was already established in power and that held distorted values. Feaur highlighted a few cases in Indonesia, Germany, United States and other countries where student movements had risen to oppose the untenable values that had been doggedly defended by the establishment. Feaur was noted for highlighting the opposition of student movements towards the Vietnam War. The tendency of a government to turn a deaf ear to the suffering, needs and aspirations of the younger generation is a recurring theme, according to Feaur. This conflict between the generations can be seen in the current situation in Malaysia where numerous decisions of the ruling government have been oppressive of the younger generation.

Many acts of student movements, some of them manifested as expressions of their legitimate rights and being in pursuit of these basic rights, have been stonewalled. For example, in the issue of the National

Higher Education Fund Corporation (*Perbadanan Tabung Pendidikan Tinggi Nasional*, PTPTN) loans, the student movement had asked that these loans be given as scholarships rather than as interest loans that come with many clauses which are questionable. Students demonstrated by launching the “Occupy Dataran Merdeka” initiative, camping at the historic venue of the declaration of Malaysian independence in Kuala Lumpur for almost one week. Their demand was for the government to abrogate loans for higher education and convert them to scholarships instead, but the ruling government completely ignored this demand. The student movement also joined the *BERSIH* demonstrations in order to prevail on the government to reform the general election system because many, especially among the younger generation felt that there had been a lot of lacunae, gerrymandering, covert manipulation and misconduct in the conducting of the 13<sup>th</sup> Malaysia General Election. However, the ruling government did not respond to the objections. Although there had been some changes to the law in this respect, by and large, they have been merely cosmetic amendments, and the core injustices of this system still remain. The student movement, representing the voice of the new generation, would not have risen against the older generation if the administration of the country had been practising transparency and accountability. The student movement can be looked upon as the voice of the new generation because in Malaysia the age range for youths is defined

as those between 15 and 40 years (Youth Organisation and Youth Development Act, 2007). In Malaysia, students normally enrol in university when they are between 19 and 20 years old, based on application forms for admission into university and university programmes that students apply for and they usually complete their tertiary education in three to four years. Beginning from the 1970s (National Language Demonstration 1969, Signboard Demonstration & Baling Demonstration) until recent times (PPSMI Demonstration, *BERSIH* Demonstrations & *Hijau 2.0* Demonstration) the biggest demonstrations have all either been led or have had the active participation of the student movement, with support from the general Malaysian public, especially the youth.

It has been said by Edward Shills of the University of Chicago that the student movement is an important political opposition force; students are the reformists of an era who have the potential to influence and guide the establishment group. Thus, the activism displayed by GM13 was actually to guide and realign the establishment group towards a new political landscape that is not based on race but rather on factual, valid reasoning and the tenets of civil society. The student movement fought for long in order to get the attention of the ruling government to their demand for creating a new political landscape, even though the ruling government repeatedly turned a deaf ear to them. In the end, the government agreed to the student movement's demand to establish a new political landscape by

amending AUKU in 2012. Although many more reforms need to be done, this was one of the most significant victories for the student movement in their long-running struggle with the ruling government. Prior to this, university students were denied the right to participate in national politics even though the Malaysian Constitution, Article 10, Clause on Freedom of Speech, Assembly and Association had given the right to all Malaysians to participate freely in national politics (Metro, 22 October, 2012). The ruling government also changed its policy on Public/Private Institutions of Higher Learning (IPTA/IPTS). The government policy had professed to produce students who were excellent both in academic and holistic development, with all-round capabilities, but the situation on the ground was that local graduates were widely regarded as lacking in critical thinking abilities and credible communication skills, unlike graduates of elite universities, which produce well-rounded, high-performing students. Analogies have been drawn by citing the local car manufacturer Proton as producing cars in "Proton class", not "Porsche class" or "BMW class" (Ujang, Z.).

Student movement activities such as '*Mahasiswa Occupy*' challenged the Malaysian Prime Minister and exerted a certain amount of pressure on the government. Having said this, there is much more that can be done by Malaysian academia to exert their much-needed influence on efforts to further the cause of civil society and students' rights. In 2013, a

few months before the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election, the ruling government expressed a change of policy for students in institutions of higher learning (IPTA/ IPTS), emphasising the need to produce university students who are excellent in aspects of thinking skills, problem solving and oral communication (Datuk Seri Mohamed Khalid Nordin, 29 January, 2013). Many, however, would argue that this was merely an exercise in appeasement.

#### *Student Movement Role as Information Disseminator*

One of the ways to spread ideas and information in Malaysia is through fora and symposia, but in this millennium, a new medium has come to the fore that has tremendous and almost unparalleled power in creating a new form of civil society. The medium of course, is social media. Needless to say, the youth have availed themselves of this new transformational medium. For the student movement, IT-based social media has become a force that can propel student activism to incredible levels. When everyone can communicate with everyone else, then the potential for manipulation and oppression becomes greatly reduced. This technological phenomenon was used effectively in the Arab Spring movement, predominantly by university students and the younger generation, and it cut across national borders, through cultural differences and other barriers. The people of many Arab nations such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman,

Saudi Arabia and Palestine managed to establish links among themselves in cybersphere and the results were nothing less than spectacular. Movements similar to the ‘Occupy Movement’, which began in the US to protest economic inequality, were made possible largely through social media. These movements have been seen across continents, involving countries like Armenia, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, Malaysia, Mexico, Mongolia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, the Republic of Ireland, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States.

In Malaysia, this new medium was used during the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election by both *Barisan Nasional* and *Pakatan Rakyat* cyber troopers, tech-savvy social media users who used the Internet to disseminate political propaganda/information to whip up the support of the public for their political agenda. This activity was spearheaded by youth/ university students. Indeed, the Internet has become the preferred channel for Generation Y in Malaysia for obtaining information (Astro Awani, 6 May 2013). The efficacy of fora and symposia was proven by the student movement in their heyday (1960-1970) when two of its symposia held in 1967 (Symposium on Rural Population Problems) and 1968 (Symposium on Malaysian Education Policy) helped to solve social issues such as land redistribution at state level and issues relating to Universiti Kebangsaan

Malaysia that had haunted Malaysia at that time (Muhammad Abu Bakar, 1973). The objective of the Symposium on Rural Population Problems was to discuss and review the problems faced by rural folk. The event was conducted by the Malay Language Association of Universiti Malaya (PBMUM) under the leadership of Sanusi Osman. It won positive publicity from the local media because influential personalities from universities and government administration (Senator Aisyah Ghani, E. Zainal Abidin Wahid, Arshad Ayub and Syed Husin Ali) had been present at this event. Fora and symposia conducted by student movements were highlighted by the local media and they exposed the new dimension of student movements in undertaking social work. The outcome of this symposium was that PBMUM prevailed upon the government, through Institut Teknologi MARA (ITM) and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), to provide opportunities for rural people to receive proper higher education and also to review the land distribution policy at national and state levels for the rural population (Muhammad Abu Bakar, 1973). Again, in 1968, PBMUM organised an event called Symposium on Malaysian Education Policy, which had similarities to the National Language Seminar held in 1966. Its main objective was to expose the abuse to the status of Bahasa Melayu as the National Language. One of the biggest contributions of the student movement was instigating the establishment of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) in 1970, when it supported intellectuals who advocated the

idea of a Malay-medium higher education institute, in the face of opposition from certain parties within the government. The PBMUM fought for the development of UKM, holding emergency summits and press conferences; they also launched a fundraiser to support the UKM sponsor committee.

GM13 used the same method to spread information to the public and to gain more support on eight core policies outlined in their manifesto. GM13, by mobilising the student organisations under them, launched several rallies and fora before the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election. One of the events that received massive support from the media, university students and the public was a seminar called 'New Political Dimensions of Undergraduates' that involved Dato' Saifuddin Abdullah (Deputy Minister of Higher Education) and was held at Auditorium Kompleks Perdana Siswa Universiti Malaya. The organiser of this event was the Student Representative Council of Universiti Malaya (MPPUM). This event managed to gather 400 to 500 participants, and coverage from the media for this seminar was quite positive especially from Sinar Harian (Nizam Zain, 13 March 2013). A rally was also launched by Gelombang Anak Muda Tolak BN (Tolak), one of the student organisations under GM13. This rally involved 150 university students who travelled in convoy from Kuala Lumpur to Temerloh, Maran and Kuantan and ended, significantly enough, in Pekan, Pahang (the constituency of the Prime Minister). Most of the students

joined the convoy using their own cars and motorcycles. This rally received positive response from the local people and in every rally, almost 1000 people came to listen to the speeches (Harakah Daily, 16 April 2013). The significance of this forum between GM13, representing the voice of university students, and Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah, as representative of the establishment group, was reflective of a more liberal administration of the ruling government and its transformation programme initiated by the Prime Minister towards efforts to develop a base for the student movement as a massive engine of information dissemination among Malaysians (UM News, 13 March 2013). This forum managed to gather many student leaders to hear the ideas championed by GM13 and most of them seemed positive to the ideas presented, applauding in support when the GM13 representative presented the movement's views. Even though most of the people who attended this forum were university students, there were also members of the general public who came and gave their support at this forum. They included Y. Bhg Prof. Datuk Dr. Rohana Yusof (Deputy Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Alumni), Universiti Malaya residential college principals, representatives from the UMNO Youth Wing, representatives from the Higher Education Ministry and representatives of student organisations from all over the Klang Valley (Universiti Malaya Website). Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah, as government representative, acknowledged the student

movement's role in civil society in Malaysia at this forum, while giving university students certain fresh perspectives in this regard (Saifuddin Abdullah, 18 March 2013). During this forum Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah recognised the student movement as an important member of civil society when he outlined seven roles that the student movement could play in the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election (Saifuddin Abdullah, 18 March 2013), namely:

- Students could stand either as independent candidates, student movement candidates, candidate of civil society movement or political party candidates.
- Students could propose, advocate and become agents for any candidate.
- Students were allowed to campaign. They could campaign in public spaces, during speeches, work in the operations rooms of parties, meet voters face-to-face, or campaign through the media, especially social media.
- Students could become observers in the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election. They could be signed up by non-governmental organisations, appointed by the Election Commission (EC), other bodies, or through the student movement itself, including through the Internet.
- Students could assume the role of media as a writer, reporter, photographer or cameraman; and analyse, report and record their travels during the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election.

- They could act as researcher or research assistant studying the development, course and results of the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election.
- Finally, they could vote. Generally, most of the students were considered to be non- partisan, and were seen as fence-sitters.

Using social media, the student movement created new ways to spread the message contained in their manifesto. One of these was to use cartoons/comics created on social network sites such as 'Malaysian Gag' on Facebook that parodied ruling government leaders on particular issues and Malaysians as a whole. This strategy won them a lot of attention from Gen Y, who preferred to read up on latest issues from the Internet. Through funny and interesting depictions on Facebook, the student movement managed to spread their agenda. The student movement received some help from civil society elements such as the Bar Council, as in the case of their 'Occupy Dataran' initiative through which they expressed their demands to reclaim public space as has been granted in the Malaysian constitution, Article 10. If the student movement had managed to win this claim they could have continued with their activities for claiming some of their other demands made during the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election. During this attempt, the Bar Council gave them help and space in front of the Bar Council building when the student activists were evicted from Dataran Merdeka. The Council had also contributed

sleeping bags, mats, posters and personal equipment (Malaysia Kini, 1 May 2012).

Since the 1960s, the Speaker's Corner in universities had been the platform for the student movement to spread its ideas and discuss national events but after AUKU 1971 had been implemented, this platform vanished from all universities. Fortunately, under the Prime Minister's transformation project, this platform came alive again in 2009 (Berita Harian, 15 October 2009). This opportunity had been used by GM13 to spread its ideas as stated in its manifesto to university students, and several Speaker's Corner speeches were well received, garnering much positive feedback from the university student community. From 2009 onwards, through the effort of Datuk Saifudin Abdullah, all university/colleges in Malaysia were given permission to develop a Speaker's Corner in their premises. At first, this idea received a lot of positive response from the university community but after some time, involvement of students started to diminish. This was because unlike the wide range of topics allowed at the Speaker's Corner during the 1970s, topics at the current Speaker's Corners were limited. There were cases in Universiti Teknologi MARA where students' speeches were stopped by university security officers because the students did not have permission from university authorities to speak on certain issues (Keadilan Daily, 9 December 2011).

In the end, only two universities, Universiti Malaya (UM) and the Shah Alam campus of Universiti Teknologi MARA

(UITM) (Saifudin Abdullah, 20 May 2010) had some measure of participation from the student community at their Speaker's Corners, thus only these two universities had actively harnessed their Speaker's Corners as tools for information dissemination. However, when the date of the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election came closer, the establishment, through university authorities, halted several speeches by GM13 at certain Speaker's Corners without giving any clear reason for doing so (Daniel Teoh, 20 March 2013). Even though the establishment kept pushing to stop the student movements from disseminating ideas and information to the public, the students were undaunted and persisted in their efforts by giving speeches outside university grounds. This situation where the university administration stopped students from expressing their ideas happened when the GM13 members tried to give a speech at UITM's Speaker's Corner regarding their participation in the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election, but they were refused entry into UITM. In the end, GM13 members were forced to deliver their speech outside the UITM compound, which then resulted in eight students being held in custody by the police (Harakah Daily, 19 March 2013).

Several French and German philosophers mentioned in Philip G. Altbach's journal article titled 'Student Movement in Historical Perspective', concluded that the position of university students in the campus environment was proletariat, and they were more than just cogs in the higher education system (Jones,

1962). Proletariat can be defined as the class of industrial wage earners who, possessing neither capital nor production means, must earn their living by selling their labour; they are also the poorest class of working people (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language). The Malaysian Minister of Youth and Sports, Khairy Jamaluddin Abu Bakar, said in his speech during the opening of the National Youth Consultative Council Conference (MPBN) Session II of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division 2013-2014 at Putra World Trade Centre, Kuala Lumpur, that youths are now increasingly concerned about rising costs of living and they feel as if they are no longer part of the nation's stakeholders. They feel they are not enjoying basic privileges as citizens of this country, even though they contribute to the country's economy (The Malaysian Insider, 16 December 2013). Ernest Mandel mentioned in his paper 'The Revolt Student Movement: Theory and Practice' that he had been told by a leading Canadian educator that the reason why students can be categorised as proletariat is not because their living conditions are unsatisfactory or because they are badly treated like nineteenth-century workers, but because socially, the university/ national system has created a sort of proletariatism in universities where students have no right to participate in the determination of the curriculum, and no right to at least co-determine their own life during the four, five or six years that they spend at the university (Ernest Mandel, 21 September 1968). The reason why the student movement kept pressurising the establishment group during

their struggle in the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election was because they wanted to change the system of higher education which had failed to give them any room to contribute in civil society and act as watchdogs in Malaysia.

Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim had proposed that civil society in the context of Malaysia in 1995 could be represented by the establishing of a society called Madani Society. At least 14 features of the Madani Society were highlighted by Ahmad Baso and some of these features were implemented by the student movement in the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election. These included spreading power in the interest of society to give strength to an alternative force; incorporating both the interests of the individual and the nation; creating empowerment of community through activities of liberal social institutions with diverse perspectives; encouraging individuals and groups in society to be respectful of others, thereby creating reconciliation; and finally, encouraging people to have a passion for knowledge and advancement of knowledge and thus, create a great civilisation and instil high morality (Ahmad Baso, October 1999). The student movement knew from the onset that it did not stand a chance of winning the election; its ultimate idea in participating in the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election was to create a society that could move or respond to issues at national level without being bound to paradoxes prevalent in modernisation. This was what it tried to create in Malaysia through the Madani Society, and they started it on a small scale, first in university campus society as it was an ideal society, having an advanced

cultural and social system in addition to being founded on moral principles that ensured a balance between freedom and social stability (Norazlan Hadi Yaacob, 2013). This idea was similar to that of Montesquieu, Rousseau, Locke and Hobbes, who had also tried to build a civil society capable of overcoming the absolute power of the monarchy and the church (Diamond, 2003). Several philosophers, including Syed Hussein Al-Atas as expressed in his book 'Who is at Fault – Mental and Personal Revolution Domains of Malays' ('Siapa Yang Salah-Sekitar Revolusi Mental dan Peribadi Melayu'), suggested that the kind of revolution that Malaysia needs is a mental revolution. The student movement continued organising fora and public speeches in the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election because that was the only way to overhaul aspects which were no longer relevant in higher education. The revolution created by the student movement in the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election had awakened Malaysian citizens by spreading information and raising awareness regarding key issues.

Additionally, Malaysian society, especially the population of rural and semi-rural Malay communities, seemed to be mindlessly bound by loyalty to the government without discernment, and this contributed to a lack of competitiveness among the Malay community because for years their hardship was manipulated by the government. It is difficult to deny that this has been a form of hindrance to achieving meaningful emancipation and progress for themselves. This is the social reform that the student movement attempted

to trigger based on Syed Hussein Alatas' mental revolution theory (Syed Hussein Alatas, 1972). The Malays are still bound by values passed on from earlier generations through proverbs like '*Budi dibalas budi*' (One good turn deserves another) and '*Budi dikenang hingga ke akhir hayat*', (A kind deed should be remembered to the grave). While these may be good guiding principles in life for any community, within the Malay community of Malaysia, they tended to encourage a certain tendency to over-value the expected moral duties of a government to its electorate; while the government was simply honouring its responsibilities to the people, the people tended to see it as the great bestowing of favours upon the common people, in superlative terms. The masses seemed to be living under the false perception that they could not disobey the government even if the rulers had committed grievous misdeeds or offences. The student movement sought to change this mindset of Malaysians, specifically the Malays, through their activities in the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election. Loyalty was to be expected based on merit and in appropriate, relevant circumstances, while archaic modes of thinking had to be seriously reviewed, to ensure the continued evolution of a Malaysian culture and nation.

Overall, it needs to be acknowledged that the student movement was not able to trigger a mental revolution among Malaysians to the level necessary for social transformation. However, to a certain extent, it did succeed in bringing to awareness a segment of the populace, especially those among the educated, who have started to

think along different lines in Malaysia (Wan Hashim, 2011).

## CONCLUSION

The student movement in the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election positioned itself in the vanguard of Malaysian politics, leading front-line demonstrations at the national level such as the TURUN demonstration. It also played a major role in organising other national-level demonstrations. The student movement now represents the voice of Malaysians in demanding equality for all citizens, and this is their main role in the civil society movement, which has to function as the intermediary space between the government and the common people. Although the student movement can claim certain victories after several years of the struggle to reclaim their rights, just as with other Malaysian activists in the political field, it must be borne in mind that support and assistance was given by individuals from the establishment group, and this did much to make the situation possible. These individuals include Khairy Jamaluddin and Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah, who through their courage and moral strength invigorated the often beleaguered student movement so that they could participate meaningfully and actively in the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election. In this sense, Khairy Jamaluddin was different from most previous UMNO youth leaders as he accepted the diversity in ideology and did not use his power to curb students ideology but preferred to use the debate platform to justify it. This can be seen through his participation in debates twice with Rafizi

Ramli of the Opposition party, the first time in front of student leaders in London before the Malaysian 13<sup>th</sup> General Election and the second on national television (Armand, 2012). It has to be mentioned as well that the decision of the Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Hj. Najib Tun Abdul Razak, to amend AUKU in 2012, caused certain restrictions on the student movement to be lifted. The role of the student movement can be even wider, such as that of The National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT). This movement not only managed to change Thailand's military government to a democratic government in 1973 but it also went deep into the hinterland, especially to poor villages in order to spread the idea of democratic government. This movement developed democracy classes to help Thailand's rural and semi-rural people to understand the process of democracy in a better way. Given the rather disturbing and thought-provoking statistics that 30% of Malaysians living in rural and semi-rural parts of Malaysia had put 71% of politicians into Parliament, and that 158 of the 222 parliamentary seats are classified as non-urban (malaysianfactbook.com), the urgency and importance accorded to reaching out to the secluded rural population may well hold the key in deciding the future political landscape of the nation. This point cannot be stressed enough. The student movement in the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election took some steps in the right direction by canvassing from state to state to deliver messages of its manifesto and regarding the shortcomings of the establishment, but they did not go deep enough into the countryside and to

poor villages to enlighten the people of the realities of the current situation. The urban population already had access to information but the rural people remained uninformed due to unavailability of information and the infrastructure mechanisms needed for the effective sharing of information. This is the angle that needs to be worked by the student movement before the 14th General Election. Youths in the student movement would do well to heed the words of Albert Einstein: "You cannot solve a problem from the same level of consciousness that created it." In this regard, great forbearance, wisdom and maturity are essential in the student movement's onerous but highly gratifying task of disseminating truth and relevant information, thereby helping to create a lasting legacy of benevolence, peace and prosperity for Malaysia.

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