

Malaysia: Socialists to contest general election

Thursday 17 November 2022, by [BOYLE Peter](#) (Date first published: 9 November 2022).

Socialist Party of Malaysia (PSM) deputy chairperson S Arutchelvan, known as “Arul”, told *Green Left* that until just days before the close of nominations for the November 19 snap general elections, his party had hoped to have an electoral pact with opposition coalition Pakatan Harapan (Alliance of Hope, PH).

PSM hoped that, under such a pact, it would be allocated seats by PH, which is led by Anwar Ibrahim. But in the end no seats were offered.

Many people in the progressive social movements were outraged and dismayed at this decision, said Arul.

This is the first election since former Barisan Nasional (BN) Prime Minister Najib Razak was sentenced to 12 years jail for corruption. Najib, his wife Rosmah Mansor and other BN politicians are still facing further charges for corruption and money laundering.

The United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the leading party in the BN coalition, ruled Malaysia since the country gained independence in 1957 until it lost the last general election in 2018 to the PH. A split in PH in 2020 led to BN returning to government. If the BN gets a two-thirds majority in the next elections, it may be able to end the prosecution of its leaders for corruption, said Arul.

“BN wants to have an early election because it did well in recent state elections in Johor and Melaka, and is worried about the ongoing corruption trials against its leaders,” said Arul.

“Zahid Hamidi, who is the president of UMNO, is facing 47 charges. All indications are that he will be the next to be jailed, so his faction pushed for an early general election.”

In the last general election, BN was defeated with the help of a high voter turnout (82%), but this election is being held in the monsoon season. There is widespread flooding around the country and a much lower voter turnout is expected.

BN hopes to win a two-thirds majority and appoint an attorney-general who might drop the corruption charges against its leaders.

Arul said that a new feature of this general election is that all citizens over the age of 18 will be allowed to vote. In the past, people had to register to vote, but now if one has an identity card, their name will automatically be on the electoral roll.

A strong gerrymander in favour of rural seats will still advantage BN over PH, whose supporters are mostly in the cities.

“Outgoing BN prime minister Ismail Sabri claims that he never intervened in the corruption trials and that a BN under him would be a clean government,” said Arul, adding, however, that there is some doubt whether he will be made PM again if BN wins.

While corruption remains the biggest issue in this election, economic concerns, such as job insecurity, and flooding due to climate change, are also major concerns.

These are issues that the PSM has been strongly campaigning on, said Arul.

While PH refused to offer the PSM any seats, it did offer five seats to a new party, Muda (Youth), which is led by Said Saddiq, a former protege of former PM Mahathir Mohamad. Mahathir has now pulled together a new coalition of right-wing Islamic parties, while Saddiq went his own way and formed Muda.

“Muda has some progressive youth, some of whom are good friends of the PSM,” said Arul. “They say they are fed up with the old ‘dinosaur politics’. They put forward an interesting program and are very good at social media. Their TikToks get a lot of traction.

“But they don’t have a strong base in the seats they have been offered by PH, though they did quite well in the Johor state election where they won one state assembly seat, in an electoral pact with PH.

“PSM has a good relationship with Muda and we have an understanding that we will work on issues together.”

The last-minute refusal by the PH leadership to offer the PSM any seats led to the PSM having to run a modest election campaign. They will field one candidate in the federal seat of Rembau — Cikgu Tinagaram — and former student leader, Bawani KS, in the Perak state seat of Ayer Kuning. PSM “heavyweights” Arul and Dr Jeyakumar Devaraj — who held a federal seat for two terms before the previous general election — will not be running.

The PSM is running in these seats for the first time. Both candidates are locals and respected activists.

“We don’t have politicians in the PSM, just activists. And our aim, in this campaign, is to reach out to new audiences with our ideas.

“When we announced that we were not standing in PH-held seats, the social media exploded with comments like “PSM is the most principled party in the elections” and “shame on Pakatan, who don’t know who their real friends are”.

Many people immediately offered to put up the deposits for the PSM candidates and make donations to its campaign.

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