

Malaysia: Don't delay local council elections, says PSM

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Socialist Party of Malaysia (PSM) is deeply disappointed and disturbed by the statement of Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who has said yesterday that government will not be implementing local council elections as they may lead to race-related conflicts in the country.

This is a lame excuse being recycled over and over again to deny the right of the rakyat to select their representatives at the very basic level of the governance.

The prime minister is clearly turning his back on his very own cabinet ministers with this irresponsible statement, especially Housing and Local Government Minister Zuraida Kamaruddin who has committed to restore local elections within three years' time.

The excuse of local elections may lead to ethnic conflicts being used by the top leaders in the government, has demonstrated the ruling elites are still refusing to break away from the ethnic politics which was used conveniently by the previous regime for many years.

When will our politicians stop employing the menace of ethnic politics in hindering our efforts to achieve a truly democratic and just society?

As for the alleged race-related conflicts that may arise if the composition of elected local representatives does not reflect the actual proportionality of ethnic groups, or one ethnic group dominates a local councils, there are ways to overcome it if the government is serious in bringing about institutional reform, including reforming our electoral system.

The introduction of proportional representation system in local council elections, will help to produce results that reflect the actual choices made by the electorates.

Assuming the electorates are voting according to ethnic-line, the representatives in the local councils will be proportionate to the demographic ratio according to ethnicity.

Other options to consider

Another possible voting system that can be introduced in local elections, is to have multi-member Group Representative Constituencies, although there are many shortcomings of this system.

In a multimember Group Representative Constituency, it can be set up the condition that every list or team of candidates must have at least certain number of female candidates (to ensure gender balance) or certain number of candidates according to ethnic group (to ensure balance in ethnic group representation).

Besides reforming the electoral systems as one of the way to allay fears that the election results may

create ethnic tensions, the upmost crucial task for the government and politicians is to end racial politics, including to stop using excuses derived from racial politics in postponing political and social reforms that will benefit the masses regardless of ethnicities.

Local elections is very important to lay out the foundation for healthy democracy in the era of Malaysia Baru. Only by restoring democratic local elections, we will have a more accountable and responsible governance at local level, and serve as the stepping stone to further promote participation the ordinary people from all walks of life in democratic political processes that would shape a better future for everyone.

Stop racial politics. Local democracy now!

Choo Chon Kai

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