

Malaysia: PSM blasts Zuraida's 'lame excuse' for backing down on local govt polls

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Parti Sosialis Malaysia (PSM) today lambasted Local Government and Housing Minister Zuraida Kamaruddin for backing down on the local government election issue, saying it was sad that she had given up so easily while citing lame excuses.

"This shows that someone who has been so brave previously in breaking party ranks (when in PKR) is now not prepared to do it this time in spite of making all the arguments why local government elections are good," said PSM deputy chairperson S Arutchelvan in a statement.

"While today, they keep talking about racial considerations, the main reason (for opposing local elections) is because these parties want to appoint political loyalists rather than (allow the) people to have elected representatives."

Arutchelvan was responding to Zuraida's [announcement](#) in the Dewan Rakyat today that the Perikatan Nasional government would not hold local government elections, saying that both society and local governments were not ready for "the drastic" move of council elections.

The former local councillor for the Kajang Municipal Council reminded Zuraida that far from being a drastic change, local government elections existed in the 1950s and 1960s at a time when the country had fewer facilities and poorer technology.

"Therefore it not a new thing like (that we should keep) debating as if it is something out of the world. A majority of countries in the world have the third vote," he added.

Taking a walk down memory lane, Arutchelvan said local elections were held in the country in 1958 and 1963.

"They were suspended because of the 1964 Confrontation with Indonesia and the Emergency (Suspension of Local Government Elections) Regulations 1965, not because of the May 13, 1969 racial riots."

This had followed a period when the Socialist Front coalition of the Labour Party and Parti Rakyat Malaysia had done very well in local council elections, winning the mayorship of Penang under DS Ramanathan.

Arutchelvan cited that a Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCI) to investigate the working of local governments in West Malaysia was established in June 1965 for this purpose and led by Senator Athi Nahappan and it concluded after four years that local government elections must be conducted and needed to be extended to more areas.

"These Royal Commission findings were not implemented, similar to how the Police Complaints and Misconduct Commission (IPCMC) Bill drafted by another RCI has not been implemented," lamented

Arutchelvan.

PKR's Tanjung Malim MP Chang Lih Kang also weighed in, expressing his "grave disappointment" over Zuraida's announcement.

The latest announcement is a complete turnaround from her own [statement](#) she gave in the Parliament barely a month ago.

"On July 14, 2020, the minister informed the august House that the ministry has set up a policy and operations committee to study the legal and financial aspects as well as the mechanism for implementation of local government elections.

"She also assured that a paper would be tabled in the cabinet by mid-2021," said Chang, who is also PKR spokesperson for housing, local government and infrastructure.

"In less than a month, the minister has gone back on her words. I am of the opinion that local government elections would strengthen local democracy significantly. There might be issues that we need to deal with along the process, but the idea is worth to be given serious deliberation."

He said the minister should not decide hastily and unilaterally on such important policy, especially when resources and manpower have been allocated to conduct a feasibility study.

"She should have waited for the outcome of the study and make a considered decision based on findings but unfortunately, the minister yields to political pressure and made an imprudent decision," Chang said, adding that Zuraida had "failed her test."

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