

**Direct election is the way, says Nurul Izzah**  
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Newly-elected PKR vice-president Nurul Izzah Anwar spoke for the first time in Penang yesterday on the charges that the party's recent elections were "tainted".

She began her speech at a forum on 'Rakyat Demands Electoral Reform', with the remark that the party's direct polls, which were littered with irregularities and flaws, had confirmed one thing: there is no such thing as bad publicity.

NONEHowever, the Lembah Pantai MP (right) said, if not for PKR's direct election system, younger or lesser-known candidates would not have stood a chance to win posts.

"I dare say that without this direct elections process, even I and the young leaders elected to the supreme council recently would not have stood a chance," she said at the forum, which was organised by civil society organisations as part of Penang's Local Democracy Week.

"Without this system, the people who are quite senior would have stood in the way of the newer leaders (and won), and in my honest opinion, that would be a great impediment; the only way is to have direct elections," Nurul Izzah added.

All candidates felt they were on equal standing

However, she stayed away from saying that the criticisms against the conduct of the party polls had resulted in the departure of its former Federal Territories chief Zaid Ibrahim, who has vowed to form a new party in January.

Nurul Izzah said the good thing about the recent party polls was that all candidates were made to feel they were on an equal standing with the one another.

She was referring to several elected representatives in the party NONEwho failed to retain, or win, top party posts within their divisions, including Subang MP R Sivarasa and Bukit Lanjan assemblyperson Elizabeth Wong (right).

"You get to sense you are only a member. Nobody cares if you are a parliamentarian or state assemblyperson, you have to obtain the votes; it brings us down to be equal with the other members,"she said.

"It is an important exercise to close party ranks and (to accept) that we are in this together and have a common shared value."

She commended the party for embarking on the direct elections as it was willing to push the envelope for greater democracy.

As a new party, it was incumbent on PKR to constantly push forward new ideas, even though this meant that it had to face greater moral responsibilities and expectations from the electorate.

"There were many internal disagreements and resistance as it was not easy to handle this hot issue, this humongous task; it also fed on the fears of some leaders that their positions were not secure.

'Intention to democratise the party'

"But the main intention was to further democratise the party; it would be very difficult for us, in Selangor for example, to expect to go the distance if we have tasted federal power," Nurul Izzah added.

"So, the expectation is that it is better for us to change now before we gain a certain amount of critical influence."

She also said nobody could control the public relations aspects of the process of the party elections during its duration of about three months up to last month.

Every member who had access to the media could challenge or criticise the election process as it was a mammoth task, needing huge logistic preparations.

subang pkr polling 141110 votingSuch a task also required a lot of funding, proper management such as finding suitable places for voting and ensuring enough and qualified election officials were involved, she said.

"It is a good reflection of how the general elections are conducted," she added.

Nurul Izzah said despite the bad publicity, she appreciated that there was room for internal disagreement and criticism.

She said the party took a huge hit from delegates who were not fully satisfied with how the elections were conducted.

"So to say that it was a perfect system, lock, stock and barrel, no... we are not going to pat ourselves on the back and say we have done a great job.

"But it is an important initiative that sets us apart from the other political parties... in all parties and in all political processes, there are bound to be money politics and political rivalry. What is important is how we tackle and reduce these," she added.