

Umno has keris, DAP the rocket, why not the 'clenched fist'?

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Parti Sosialis Malaysia (PSM), which recently won a decade-long battle for recognition, faces a new hurdle after authorities rejected its "clenched fist" symbol as too violent.

PSM has used the symbol - an iconic image for the political left around the world - since 1998 when it first applied for registration.

"The Election Commission has rejected our fist symbol. In a letter in February they said the symbol is morally not suitable and demonstrates violence," the party's secretary-general S Arutchelvan told AFP.

"Now we can't stand for an election since the logo is not approved. We are angry. The ban comes as a surprise to us," he said.

Arutchelvan rejected any negative connotations linked to the symbol and said it was being unfairly singled out compared to the ruling party Umno.

"For us, it is a logo to reflect our struggle to uplift the welfare of the people and promote people's powers," he said.

"Umno is allowed to use the dagger logo while the opposition Democratic Action Party uses the rocket symbol. So why can't we use the fist?"

Gov't tightening the screws

The small opposition party, which has one lawmaker in the national parliament, finally won approval to be registered last August.

Arutchelvan said the latest setback in its quest for full recognition raised fears that Malaysia faces an era of repression as new leader Najib Razak prepares to take power.

"Now it looks like the government is tightening the screws. We fear it is the beginning of the rule of suppression in Malaysia," he said.

Najib is expected to be sworn in as premier in coming days, after Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was forced to agree to step down in the fallout from disastrous elections a year ago.

Recent moves including the banning of two opposition newspapers, and the use of tear gas to break up a rally by opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim, have raised concerns Najib may adopt a hardline approach.

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