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DR M 'NO' TO COUNCIL POLLS

They will create racial conflicts and widen urban-rural gap, claims PM

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PRIME Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has shot down the possibility of instituting local council elections, saying they will create racial conflicts and widen the urban and rural gap.

"No local council elections. Local council elections may produce the wrong result. Urban (areas) may be different, rural (areas) will be different.

"There will be conflict, emphasised probably by racial differences. So we don't want that to happen," he said after officiating the Empowering Local Council Convention hosted by the Housing and Local Government Ministry at the Putrajaya International Convention Centre.

Present was Housing and Local Government Minister Zuraida Kamaruddin.

Zuraida had, in May, envisioned that mayoral and local council president elections could be held within three years once the country's economy stabilised.

She had said that the ministry would study the matter this year, and that it was only proper to have mayoral and local council elections as local councils were the "third government" (after the federal and state governments).

In response, Zuraida said her ministry would continue its study on implementing local government elections.

She said the ministry took note of the prime minister's concerns.

"This (local government elections) was expressed in Pakatan Harapan's manifesto to strengthen local democracy, which will



Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad speaking at the Empowering Local Council Convention in Putrajaya yesterday. PIC BY AHMAD IRHAM MOHD NOOR

have a direct effect on the quality of local government services.

"The ministry has taken into account all angles, including the development of local government elections, which will be tabled only in three years."

DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng said any decision on holding local government elections must be agreed to by all parties in PH.

He said although local government elections were something DAP had fought for, the party could not override the four-party coalition, especially when it involved government policies.

"Of course we will push for it. But we have to abide by what is outlined in the manifesto.

"We need to fulfil promises in the manifesto first.

"Then we have to convince PH on the need to include local government elections.

"The housing and local government minister (Zuraida) has

agreed to it, but she has to convince the prime minister and the cabinet."

Gerakan deputy president Oh Tong Keong said reviving local government elections was stated in the PH manifesto.

"Unfortunately, it seems that the government's excuses have been renewed and the public has to brace itself for another policy U-turn by PH."

He said Dr Mahathir's reasoning that local elections would spark racial conflict were "far-fetched and unconvincing."

"The impact of a local government election on interracial relations is minuscule compared with a general election."

He said this move was similar to PH's promises on the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN), recognition of the Unified Examination Certificate, abolishment of draconian laws and toll collection. **Additional reporting by Mohd Husni Mohd Noor**