

## **People not ready for local elections, says Dr Mahathir**

**Free Malaysia Today**

**April 8, 2017**

**By Sean Augustin**

### **Former prime minister not in favour of local government elections as he claims it could be detrimental to race relations.**

SHAH ALAM: Dr Mahathir Mohamad last night admitted that for now he was not keen on local council elections, fearing that it would polarise the different races in the country even further.

Unlike other countries, Malaysia, the former prime minister said, is a multiracial nation.

As it stands, he said, most of the ethnic Chinese were residing in the urban areas, while a majority of the Malays were in rural areas.

According to 2016 statistics, Malays currently make up 50% of the Malaysian population, followed by the ethnic Chinese with 22% and Indians (6%).

If local council elections were held, the former prime minister said this would see urbanites governed by one race, while another race would be managing the rural areas.

“We already have problems in vernacular schools and if we divide areas along racial lines it would be dangerous,” the Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM) chairman said at a dialogue here last night.

Local council elections used to be held in Malaysia until it was abolished under the Local Government Act 1976. Appointments have since been based on the political party ruling the state, except in Kuala Lumpur, which has only parliamentary seats as a Federal Territory, hence the Federal Government appoints office bearers to the Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL).

DAP’s push for local elections a few years ago put it at odds with its then Pakatan Rakyat partner PAS, with the Islamist party’s president, Abdul Hadi Awang warning that it could spark racial polarisation in Chinese-majority urban areas.

The Marang MP was also reported as claiming local elections could eventually lead to a repeat of the May 13 race riots.

But Mahathir did not outright reject local elections, stressing that balancing the racial makeup in the urban areas was a greater priority.

“There must be a greater effort to reign in more Malays to the urban areas, just as we see happening in KL to ensure there is no gulf between the races.”

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Source: <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2017/04/08/people-not-ready-for-local-elections-says-dr-mahathir/>