

Malaysia's 14th General Election

The PSM: reluctant politicians who fight for a better Malaysia

Friday 20 April 2018, by [ANAND R.K](#) (Date first published: 12 April 2018).

As Malaysia prepares for its 14th General Election, partisan politics has transformed the nation into a toxic wasteland. Nothing is inviolable. Race and religion are belittled and exploited, insults are traded and the indefensible is defended. The moral compass points south.

Amid this dystopian backdrop, there is a band of politicians who refuse to participate in the mudslinging match, preferring to focus on policies and the problems of the poor instead.

And while history is replete with examples of how politicians would devise diabolical schemes, manipulate, lie and even kill for positions and power, PSM, however, has to twist the arms of its members to contest in elections.

Its chairperson Mohd Nasir Hashim is no different. Despite writing letter after letter to dissuade members from electing him as party leader, he keeps winning unopposed.

In an interview with *Malaysiakini*, PSM's central committee member S Arutchelvan discusses what sets the socialist party apart and its struggle to find a place in the hearts and minds of Malaysians.

"We have a different kind of problem compared to other parties," he quipped.

"We have leaders who are reluctant to be politicians, they want to remain as activists working on the ground and helping people.

"Even I had written letters in the past, explaining why I should not be fielded as a candidate. So we have to force people to stand. We have to tell them it's their 'revolutionary' duty," he added.

According to Arutchelvan, PSM's sole federal lawmaker Sungai Siput MP Dr Michael Jeyakumar Devaraj had also objected to defending his seat for the third time in the coming general election.

In the past, Jeyakumar had tabled a resolution to limit PSM's elected representatives to two terms and it was passed.

"Jeyakumar has always emphasised setting a good example. He warns us about corruption. That is why he gives most of his salary as an MP to the party and declares his assets," said Arutchelvan.

"After his resolution was passed, there was much discourse on the issue. There was a feeling that as a socialist, you must spend a longer time in politics.

"Jeyakumar was against this. Another branch put forth a different resolution (to lift the two-term

limit) and this was passed.

"Jeyakumar felt he should not contest again, but in PSM, we believe that the wisdom of the majority outweighs the views of an individual."

Big picture vs the bigger picture

On the party's appeal amongst Malaysians, Arutchelvan claimed that PSM's membership has increased, with more Malay youths signing up.

"It was initially more Indian-based, but now Malay members are on the rise, especially those born in the 1990s. Out of 10 who join us now, seven are Malays," he revealed.

Arutchelvan conceded that while its position might not be pragmatic in the political sense, it is, however, rooted in principles and when the rest look at the 'big' picture, PSM sees the 'bigger' picture.

He explained that one of the reasons for PSM not being as popular as other political parties is because it steers clear of using the race and religious cards.

"All political parties in Malaysia play the racial and religious cards," he added.

The second reason, he pointed out, is that Malaysians are clear about the two-party system, with many desiring change.

"Even we are hoping Pakatan Harapan would come into power. Because when they do, people would see there is no much difference between the two parties (Harapan and BN) and would look for an alternative.

"So the illusion of the two-party system must be eradicated before the progressive third wave can flourish," he added.

Arutchelvan said PSM is at the forefront when the poor face problems and it champions issues such as better healthcare, affordable housing, and minimum wage.

"(But) only the minority of Malaysians look at policies and whatnot. Malaysian politicians don't have to do such things...

"All they need is race politics, 1MDB, how (caretaker prime minister Najib Abdul Razak's wife) Rosmah (Mansor) dresses...

"I am in about 120 Whatsapp groups, everything is racial. So there is no need to talk about policies," he added.

Shattering the belief that elites control politics

Arutchelvan also pointed out that Harapan appears to have engaged the reverse gear in its pursuit of Malay votes in the coming general election.

"When (former opposition leader) Anwar Ibrahim came out with the 'Buku Jingga' and changed 'Ketuanan Melayu' (Malay hegemony) to 'Ketuanan Rakyat' (People's hegemony), we thought it was a brave move. 'Buku Jingga' was a progressive document.

"But now, in order to generate a 'Malay tsunami', the current manifesto has gone backward... things

like local government elections have been left out because of the race factor as there might be a lot of Chinese and Indian councillors.

“So it looks like we have to go one more round. Dr Mahathir Mohamad comes to power and we fight racial politics all over again,” he added.

Meanwhile, Arutchelvan said PSM is fielding Orang Asal, farmers and activists in the coming general election.

This is to shatter the illusion that it is the elites who control politics. We want to send a message that a good leader does not need to be a doctor or a lawyer,” he added.

PSM’s manifesto makes it crystal clear where the party’s struggle is focussed. Dubbed as the “Manifesto for the 99%”, it pledges, among others, equal opportunities for all communities and to enable all to escape poverty and marginalisation.

“We, the people of this land of earthly beauty and ecological diversity, each with our different tongues and traditions, pledge to co-create a new society founded on the principles of freedom, equality, and solidarity” - reads the preamble’s opening paragraph.

R.K Anand

[Click here](#) to subscribe to our weekly newsletters in English and or French. You will receive one email every Monday containing links to all articles published in the last 7 days.

P.S.

Malaysiakini

<https://m.malaysiakini.com/news/419466>