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A victory for ethnic extremism

THAT Lunas decided to give its electoral mandate to the Opposition does not change the political equation of the country. That had been determined at the last general election a year ago when the Barisan Nasional (BN) secured more than two-thirds majority to govern for another five-year term and the Opposition made in-roads in Terengganu.

Before Lunas, there were two by-elections after the November general election - Sanggang and Port Dickson. In both, BN won defeating PAS and Keadilan, respectively. Nevertheless, all three by-elections were too small to affect the bigger political picture.

But in Lunas emerged a trend that will have major implications on Malaysians. Unchecked this trend could affect peace and prosperity in this multi-racial country. What some quarters did in Lunas went beyond the "hate campaign" associated with anti-government or anti-establishment movements, which by themselves are dangerous enough.

In Lunas, they resorted to racial issues to threaten the Government and to influence votes. Some groups were making demands for the Chinese, some groups were running down the Indians, and some others were pitting the Indians against the Malays, or the Malays against the Chinese over education, religion and other issues.

In the run-up to the by-election that was held two days ago, there was an unmistakable attempt by some to turn what should be a clean, democratic process into a platform to make demands along racial lines. A group of "Chinese extremists" was, in fact, threatening the Government to review a certain policy with regards to the so-called Vision Schools concept if they were to support the BN.

Some politicians from the Opposition were quick to support this group, knowing that the non-Malay votes would figure prominently in Lunas. The BN Government could have chosen to be popular with these groups and agree to their demands. It knew that the Chinese education movement was using the Vision Schools issue at Lunas and threatening to support the Opposition if the Government does not back its cause.

But clearly Umno and its allies were not prepared to win a by-election at the expense of a national policy aimed at benefitting Malaysians in general, instead of just a particular ethnic group. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad branded the Chinese who were taking advantage of the by-election to harp on the Vision Schools issue as "Chinese extremists" because that is what they are.

Like all extremist groups, they are a threat to the nation's security and well-being. Unfortunately, these extremists had the support of the Opposition. Not because the Opposition believes that the sekolah kebangsaan should continue to exist, but because by doing so guaranteed them votes from the Chinese who would support such a movement.

Even in Singapore, where the Chinese are a bigger majority than the Bumiputeras are in Malaysia, the Government had abolished all the kebangsaan schools by the 1970s and integrated them because it was necessary to expedite progress. In Lunas, some groups did not want the various races to progress together and wanted to continue to isolate the Chinese from the others from young.

The BN, as the Government of the day, must look beyond Lunas. Winning it back from the Opposition must now be relegated to a secondary concern, given the events surrounding the by-election. There will be other groups

who will be encouraged to emulate the racial extremism of Lunas, and this poses a real security threat to the nation as a whole.

The Government of the day is obliged to put a stop to the use of racial issues by anyone at any time that may incite negative racial sentiments. It was far too lenient to these elements in Lunas. It cannot afford to next time, because the next time the extremists could go overboard and put all Malaysians in great jeopardy.

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