

**K'jaan Terengganu, Pahang umum bayar bonus
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COMMENT Yesterday marked a month since the 'Walk for Democracy' rally, organised by electoral reform coalition Bersih 2.0, made local and international news.

With it, Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's credibility as a leader came into question.

Unable to deal with the truth that the July 9 rally revealed, Najib moved fast to put in place 'incentives' that he thought would appease the rakyat and make them forget all about that day of reckoning for the BN government and Umno.

A little haphazardly, Najib fixed his gaze on the Indian community and realised he must win their votes, if not hearts, and decided that appointing an Indian politician as a second minister in the cabinet would do the trick.

So, during the MIC annual general meeting last month, in the wake of the Bersih 2.0 rally, Najib broke the news that G Palanivel, the MIC president, would be made a minister in the Prime Minister's Department.

Before being appointed as a full minister, Palanivel was deputy minister of plantation industries and commodities.

But Najib's strategy backfired. Instead, questions abounded about Palanivel's sincerity in serving the rakyat and his constituents.

Palanivel, 61, a journalist-turned-politician, was defeated in his stronghold of Hulu Selangor by 98 votes in the 2008 general election, which witnessed the Indian community, once considered loyal supporters of BN, voting for the opposition instead.

The MIC top brass, including the then number two, Palanivel, failed to retain their seats.

However, MIC recaptured the Hulu Selangor parliamentary seat during a by-election held last year, which fielded a newcomer, P Kamalanathan (left).

Palanivel, who took over the MIC leadership on Dec 6, 2010, from the long serving S Samy Vellu, was later made a senator before being appointed as deputy minister.

Now a minister, the move by Najib has ended MIC's 35-year wait when the party, which initially had two full ministers, had to settle for two deputy minister posts.

Merit not the criteria

Najib's justification for promoting Palanivel to a full ministerial position was that it was a mark of appreciation for the contribution of Indians.

Merit, then, was of no particular concern for Najib in appointing Palanivel as minister in the PM's Department.

Indeed, it is "all about politics" as ironically, in the 2010 Hulu Selangor by-election, Najib decided not to field Palanivel as the candidate despite the latter having held the seat for three consecutive elections.

Najib's excuse was that he wanted a 'saleable' candidate and chose Kamalanathan to win back the Indian voters.

As one MIC leader had said: "Palanivel did not win any post by merit and this is a setback, not only for

him but also for the MIC. It will be indebted to Umno until Palanivel is replaced."

It is apparent that this his appointment as minister hardly makes a dent in the lives of the 1.8 million-strong Indian community, which has become accustomed to the 'dramas' played by MIC.

Incentives for pulling in voters

Barely hours after he was made a full minister, Palanivel went on to say that he would give away 'incentives', such as iPads and trips to Hindu temples in India, to branch leaders who bring in 1,000 MIC members to be registered as voters.

"Currently, we have about 200,000 MIC members who have yet to register as voters... we have to go to the ground and register them. If we can do this, then the party will have 600,000 registered voters.

"Once this is achieved... MIC will be a powerful voting bloc. Although Indians are a minority in the country, we can become a powerful party."

But what power is Palanivel talking about? His so-called incentives are open bribes to get more Indians to support MIC and boost BN's chances at the polls, which in turn would place Palanivel in the good books of his political masters.

It's truly unfortunate that after such a long time, when a second full ministerial position has been given to MIC, the leader has no clue as to what the Indian community needs.

What message is Palanivel sending by offering bribes like iPads and trips to India to the Indian community in particular?

If nothing else, it tells volumes of the desperation faced by Najib in wanting to wrestle back power from the opposition.

Arrogant leaders

Truly, arrogance is the middle name of our politicians. And Palanivel is no different when he said MIC would "walk out" of BN if the ruling party allowed other Indian-based parties to join the BN as direct members.

"They can become associate members but not direct members," he added.

"Umno does not allow any other Malay party to join the BN, the MCA also does not allow other Chinese-based parties to join the BN as direct members. Gerakan is a multi-racial party.

"If Umno allows other Malay-based parties to join BN as direct members, we do not mind," were Palanivel's words of threat.

What is going on here, Palanivel? Are you not a servant of the Indian community? Isn't it their needs, and not your own agenda, that should be the priority?

Palanivel a poor choice

There's no doubt that Palanivel's appointment as a full minister is Najib's act of desperation, in trying to hoodwink the Indian community into believing that BN has their welfare at heart.

Indeed, if the Indian community's worries were of any concern to BN, the ruling party would waste no time in helping Indians who are being made homeless by City Hall, as in the case of the Bukit Jalil Estate workers.

Where are the Indian leaders like Palanivel when the police indulge in lock-up abuse of Indian detainees which have led to their deaths?

And, Palanivel's play-safe reaction to the 'Interlok' novel controversy has said it all.

He has done little for the Indian community to win support for his leadership, be it in uplifting their socio-economic status or helping bright Indian children obtain scholarships to further their education.

Palanivel's appointment as minister in the PM's Department is merely to serve the BN's agenda.

All the talk by Najib about paying homage to the Indian community is nothing but lip service, the aim being to regain control and power for as long as he possibly can.

The ugly truth here is that the 'powers that be' are bent on winning back the votes lost to the opposition in the last general election and, as such, all ways and means are being deployed.

It is now up to the Indian community to decide what is best for them.

Will they go for lousy leaders who time and again will keep using the community for their personal gain, or choose a leader who genuinely has the Indian community's interests at heart?

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