

## **Hindraf's victory riddled with ambiguity**

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COMMENT The Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) has pulled off a victory by getting caretaker Prime Minister and BN chief Najib Abdul Razak to sign an agreement that promises action to fulfill four of the six demands made by the movement.

Coming two days before nominations day in the country's critical 13th general election, in which Indian votes are said to be crucial in 67 parliamentary seats, Hindraf's victory is not its alone.

The movement could not have obtained it without the threat to BN's rule posed by the opposition Pakatan Rakyat with whom it tried to negotiate a deal.

But then Hindraf's partisans would argue that Pakatan could not have attained to the BN-threatening proportions it did without the support of the movement at GE12.

The shift in the Indian vote, at GE12, away from its traditional moorings with the BN, was crucial to the denial of the ruling coalition's customary two-thirds majority in Parliament, a denial that has done Malaysian politics a great power of good.

However, the arguments about who was singularly responsible for the tsunami of March 2008 resemble a dog in search of its tail. Besides being unedifying, there's no profit in it, especially with a general election set for May 5.

Suffice to say, Hindraf has pulled off a victory.

But any move to congratulate them must be stayed for reason of the ambiguities inherent in their victory.

The Zulkifli enigma

A movement fighting for the removal of institutionalised sectarianism should be wary of a governing coalition that has a candidate like Perkasa vice-president Zulkifli Nordin on its slate.

In calling for Indians to support BN on the basis of the deal it has worked out with it, Hindraf is proposing to ignore what the implications are for the presence of a

bigot on the ballot like Zulkifli (centre in photo).

Hindraf was not appeased when Pakatan argued that it accepted the movement's demands in principle but could not sign its acceptance on the dotted line for reason of the coalition's determination to move Malaysian politics away from revolving obsessively on race.

In rebuttal, Hindraf justifiably derided provisions in the Pakatan manifesto that it claimed had a race (read: Malay) specific thrust.

In other words, Hindraf was rejecting the notion that what is good for the goose cannot be held to be not good for the gander.

Fair enough, but now Hindraf is caught in a similar straits: how true to its word can a ruling coalition pledged to Indian poverty alleviation be when it has someone like Zulkifli - who has uttered anti-Indian and anti-Hindu sentiments - on board.

Can it not be said - in a reversal of Pakatan's stance vis-à-vis Hindraf's demands - that a Zulkifli-toting BN has accepted those demands in principle but not in spirit?

A conjuror's trick

The case for wariness on the part of Indian voters to the BN-Hindraf entente is not confined to just the problems posed by the presence of Zulkifli.

Just yesterday, the Registrar of Societies (ROS) made it tenuous for DAP candidates to present their papers on nominations day tomorrow signed by the party's secretary-general because he said he does not recognise its principal office-bearers on the basis of perceived discrepancies in the internal election the party held at its congress last December.

It would take the attitude of an ostrich with its head buried in the sand to ignore the absurdity inherent in the ROS' stance, though it must be said that the DAP was not completely blameless in having contributed to the looming farce of its candidates' possible disqualification tomorrow.

The conclusion - from this ROC stand and innumerable other positions taken by government flunkies, including those in the Election Commission - is inescapable: Malaysians have long been compelled to endure rule by a BN that was characterised more by arbitrary fiat and dictatorial whim than by benign design, such as the Najib administration has just now evinced to the Indian poor by pledging acceptance of Hindraf's demands.

To slip slide sway from this reality is to allow one to be bamboozled by the seemingly benign old man - the BN, including its precursor, is now 56 years old - come to play conjuror's tricks at a children's party.

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