

Uthaya: We didn't anticipate losing our deposit
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"Quietly endure, silently suffer and patiently wait."

- Martin Luther King Jr (Why We Can't Wait)

INTERVIEW The following is the final of the two-part interview of Hindraf founder P Uthayakumar. In this part, he talks about his loss in the May 5 general election and what he hopes will be the future role of Hindraf he claims to represent.

Part one appeared yesterday.

Why did you choose to stand for election against a Pakatan Rakyat candidate when you knew it was a losing battle and there was a desire for change amongst a certain section of the electorate?

We had no choice. I have been and am consistent with the struggle that on top of Umno even the five Pakatan-ruled state governments were and are practicing institutional racist policies - see www.humanrightspartymalaysia.com - on day-to-day issues.

The concerns of the Indian poor lacked the political mileage and therefore became vulnerable. Therefore, both Umno and Pakatan take advantage of the Indian situation. For taking a strong stand against Pakatan institutional racism from the day I was released from Kamunting prison, Pakatan had refused to even talk to me despite numerous formal letters and through third parties.

NONEThe only solution forward that I could come up with was the uphill task of HRP's Project 15/38 (15 parliamentary seats/38 state seats), which was the creation of Indian majority seats as a means of attaining political empowerment to fight Umno and any other kind of institutional racism.

Project 15/38 was a failure. The closest I could get and my best bet was to contest in Kota Raja (parliament seat) and Seri Andalas (state seat under Kota Raja) - the constituencies with the highest Indian voters in the country.

Pakatan had neither respect nor regard for Hindraf and the almost 2.5 million Indians in the country by blatantly refusing to make way for us in even one of the

222 parliamentary seats for a one-to-one contest with BN.

We distributed 30,000 CDs giving specific directions not to vote BN. However, as to whether they wanted to vote Pakatan, it was up to them as Hindraf and myself were not prepared to take responsibility for Pakatan's institutional racism they had been practicing in the five Pakatan states.

NONE We also had to send a message nationwide that just as much as we, too, want a change and an end of the Umno regime, we do not want an Umno clone in Putrajaya that continues the institutional racist policies victimising especially the Indian poor.

Just a few days before the general election, I got a call from a Pakatan datuk who said if I withdraw from contesting in Kota Raja, I would be made a Pakatan senator. What? To become the latest minted Pakatan Indian mandore? A BN mandore like senator and deputy minister mandore (P) Waythamoorthy? So that I get to be politically relevant like Lee Lam Thye?

I live by the Tamil proverb that a tiger will never eat grass no matter how hungry it gets. I hope BN does not use this to link me with the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) and detain me again, this time not under ISA but Sosma.

What has been the reception of Indians towards you post-GE13?

The latest encounter is when I was at Uniten (Universiti Tenaga Nasional) yesterday, registering my daughter for the Diploma in Computer Science course.

azlan Just as I got out of my car, a Mr Suthan and his wife who had recognised me came up to speak to me. At the registration hall, before I knew it there were already about 15 people around me. Everywhere I go, people come up and talk to me. Not only Indians but also Malays and Chinese. They may not agree with me but they like some of the things I say. However, Indians ask me, 'Why Hindraf joined BN?'

This is about the same reaction I still get across the board even in post-GE13.

I still get daily phone calls complaining about the previously mentioned institutional racism. One caller, Megan from Kota Raja complimented me on my protest letter to Prime Minister Najib (Razak), the IGP (inspector-general of police) and the Home Ministry secretary-general that was reported in Makkal Osai Tamil daily on Friday on the gunning down of seven Indians seven days in a row.

When I told him that I had intended to raise the same in Parliament if I was voted in, Megan agreed with me but he apologised for not voting for me in Seri Andalas and Kota Raja. He, like most of his friends and relatives, wanted to see a change and to protest Waythamoorthy being the traitor using Hindraf and joining BN.

Sentiments like this were also in the Hindraf post-mortem findings as to why we lost badly.

Have you been offered any deals by BN at any time?

No. Never. I suppose they follow my day-to-day stand as per my unwavering and uncompromising anti-Umno and Pakatan institutional racism in www.humanrightspartymalaysia.com. Umno-BN also knows that I am no mandore. I cannot be bought over by either Umno or Pakatan.

You lost your deposit in the elections. Do you think it is time to change strategies when it comes to the disenfranchised Indians?

Yes, not only did we lose our deposit, we lost very badly. Yes, we are looking at changing strategies.

NONE However, there is not going to be any compromise on fighting institutional racism victimising especially the Indian poor by either alliance. Even if we become politically irrelevant or even if we lose our deposit again, the original Hindraf struggle stands.

How badly has this hurt the Hindraf cause and you personally?

Losing was within our contemplation but we did not anticipate losing our deposit. We concede that the forces and waves of change were so overwhelming that it had drowned us.

azlan The Waythamoorthy joining BN factor literally on the eve of the general election delivered the fatal blow. Be that as it may, we have no regrets and had to complete the cycle by contesting and also had to send the strong message nationwide that as much as we want change and want to see the end of Umno rule of Putrajaya, we simultaneously do not want Pakatan to become another BN.

We knew what we were getting into, the uphill battle, the battle that nobody wanted to take up for 50 long years - the battle with two giants and one traitor at one go, especially with very little resources, manpower and money power unlike the BN and Pakatan machinery.

Hurt, yes, but we in Hindraf recovered very quickly as the Indian poor are still plagued with the very same institutional racist problems even on the very morning after. Our struggle goes on irrespective.

What do you intend to do now?

We are waiting for the right signals from Kota Raja and Seri Andalas as our one and only way forward.

What is the status of Hindraf which you claim to be the de facto leader?

The original Hindraf will remain unregistered under the Umno regime that has otherwise registered some 47,870 other NGOs with no problems. Irrespective, we will continue to operate Hindraf under Article 10 of the federal constitution that guarantees freedom of association.

Do you think the cause of Hindraf has been damaged beyond repair?

No, Hindraf has not been damaged beyond repair. Hindraf may be bruised but will never die and will live on for as long as either party does not resolve the genuine grievances of the Indian poor.

NONEThe (RS) Thanenthiran and Waytha confusion of joining BN will clear up within one to two years. Waytha, however, is expected to have a bigger following because the Tamil dailies' propaganda will be at his disposal.

Waytha would be given bigger allocations by Umno for bigger piecemeal and temporary handouts, never the wholesome and permanent solutions and an end to the said Umno racism that is the Hindraf struggle. To this effect, I remain the last Mohican.

Writer's epilogue

And there it is. I have always had a contentious relationship with the Hindraf which Uthayakumar says he represents. However to give Uthayakumar credit, he has always listened to my point of view even when he made it very clear he disagrees with me. He has always been up-front in stating his opinions even when what he says (and he knows this) will get him into trouble with the oppositional forces in this country which he is a part of. I admire that.

We have had big arguments of his use of the term "mandore" for instance. Many

Indian opposition leaders, be they Pakatan or otherwise (and who I consider friends), are in no sense of the word "mandores". The perils of claiming to be the voice of the disenfranchised is that you may discover that at the end of the day, you are only speaking for yourself.

I have no idea how this divided Hindraf will evolve. I always think, level-headed engagement is the answer. PSM's 'Four simple task for Deputy Minister Waytha' is the kind of politics I like to see practiced. I hope, Uthayakumar will continue the good fight for the disenfranchised Indian community, but more importantly will attempt to build consensus amongst like-minded individuals.

At the end of the day, the personalities are not as important as the causes they claim to champion. However, I do think that an activist like Uthayakumar who speaks without fear or favour, is someone who is vitally important to the discourse if only to agitate the status quo.

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