

**The rise of 'Makkal Sakthi'**  
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Indian Malaysians make up at least 25 percent of voters in more than 20 parliament and state seats and this is where they can make a difference today at the ballot box. Once staunch supporters of the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition, the winds of change have recently blown through this minority community.  
MCPX

The Hindraf cause last November was the spark in the awakening of political awareness among the mostly conservative Indians. Claims of marginalisation were the major topic of discussion among the Indians at coffee shops, weddings and even toddy shops in the rural areas.

Hindraf has been used as the rallying call for not only the underclass, but also educated middle-class Indians. The November rally saw 30,000 Indian Malaysians taking the street to express their frustrations, not so much over the government's pro-Malay policy, but the discrimination they face during its implementation.

umno bn leaders election meeting 140208 samy velluThe hatred towards Umno and the New Economic Policy has also affected BN's Indian partner, MIC and its party chief, S Samy Vellu (right).

MIC officials secretly admitted that Samy Vellu has now become a liability to the party and BN, yet they defended him publicly. Former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad in an interview in Malaysiakini recently has said that Samy Vellu has never raised Indian concerns in the cabinet, and this added fodder to existing frustrations.

In his defence, Samy Vellu pulled out facts and figures on how the government has helped the Indian minorities. He claimed that the MIC-administered Asian Institute of Medicine, Science and Technology (AIMST) has alone received RM300 million, and it was named the first PIO (people of Indian origin) university outside of India.

But many Indians were not taken by such claims.

anti samy banner "In his (Samy Vellu's) statement, he claimed that RM1 million was allocated annually to the temples in Malaysia. Do you think that is enough? How many temples are there in Malaysia?" said A Vickneswaran from Ipoh.

Vickneswaran was one of the detainees in the 'Rose for Pak Lah' rally last month. He represents the voice of younger generations who are expressing anger against the government.

"We have no future in this country, we are 'anak tiri' (stepsons) of this soil!"

Such sentiments are well and alive all across the country. In an estate in Sungai Siput, a group of ethnic Tamils gathered in front of a temple, each with a story to tell. Ladang Doveny has a sizable number of Indian voters, many of whom were once staunch MIC supporters.

sg siput indian youth 080308 youths"I am here not for myself, [...] but I realise these boys must be educated of the situation," said Kalai (right), a man in his 40s, referring to the young men around him. He came all the way from Puchong in Kuala Lumpur to Sungai Siput - Samy Vellu's stronghold in Perak - two weeks before the polling day to educate the residents on 'BN's injustice'.

"Hindraf has done what MIC couldn't do at all. The Indians are now politically awakened, they know their civil rights, and they realised they have been made a fool for the past 50 years or so," said the mechanical degree holder from Sunderland University.

The sentiment on the ground in Sungai Siput is very much the same as with other parts of the country.

Further up north, in Taiping for instance, PAS members were seen shouting 'Makkal Sakthi' (people's power) on nomination day to the delight of the Indians who were there. The feeling there among Indians is that they would rather vote for the opposition, or independent, rather than BN.

sg siput indian youth 080308 youths"The temple here is not being taken care of. What lies did Samy tell regarding the allocation for temples annually? What money?" says an angry youth in Ipoh, who declined to be identified.

"We have seen too much discrimination in this country, even at school level. There is no opportunity for us to further our studies, to get employment, no nothing."

### **Many angry youth not voters**

One resident in Sungai Siput complained of being ignored by the Election Commission. The four-time voter in the constituency claimed that he was brushed aside by EC officials after finding out that he was not on the electoral rolls.

sg siput indian youth 080308 ravi"They say I'm not on the list, but I have voted four times before. They just ignored my pleas. I am a citizen of this country. What difference is there between me and an Indonesian if I can't cast my vote?" said S Ravi (left) from Ladang Dovenby.

Kalai claimed he has come across similar cases elsewhere. However, while he conceded that the 'Makkal Sakthi uprising' is strong, most angry Indian youths are not registered as voters.

MCA's Yik Phooi Hong, who is standing for Ipoh Barat, is confident of wresting this Perak seat from DAP based on this factor alone.

"Most of the youth who are angry with us are not even registered," says M Rajoo, a volunteer at BN's service centre in Buntong - a state seat which has the highest proportion of Indian voters in the country. Popularly known as 'Buntong Tiger', Yik will be facing incumbent M Kulasegaran from DAP.

lim kit siang pc 070308 kulasegaran 2Not surprisingly, Kulasegaram (right) is facing a tough fight to retain his seat, but he hopes the popularity of party leader Lim Kit Siang - who is defending the neighbouring seat of Ipoh Timur - will pull him through.

Nevertheless, whatever the outcome today, the Indian community has already made history. For the first time since Independence, they are united in their mission to ensure everyone has a place under the Malaysian sun.

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