

**New politics and the Indian Malaysian  
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The facts of the 12th general election have been recounted several times, but not the meaning of events of the socio-political drama that unfolded and burst into the public arena over the last six months, leading up to polling day. MCPX

On the ground, the election results are the outcome:

- (i) the history of what the Barisan Nasional (BN) government has actually done for the people and this nation since independence,
- (ii) political and campaign strategies of the individual parties or their coalitions,
- (iii) systematic manipulation of the voting system and constituencies and lastly,
- (iv) easy access to new information and communication technologies by all political contenders.

Among the factors, it is in the history of this nation that we need to look closely and to identify definite trends that have given us what we are experiencing today. A few centuries ago, an European social commentator and revolutionary said 'History moves forward qualitatively only on the side of and through the agency of the oppressed and marginalised. It is they who provide the social ground that offer History a new Future'.

In a sense, history had thrust upon the Indian Malaysian (specifically the Tamils) that special responsibility. The 12th general election was the temporal space where history conspired to give us the opportunity for that 'an-other' Malaysia to which many of us aspire.

Indian Malaysians have faired extremely well in that effort. They have pushed the agenda of a new politics for Malaysia. On hindsight, the rise of the Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) and later Makkal Sakthi, is undeniably a critical turning point in Malaysian politics.

They represent not just organisational politics but really the spirit of a marginalised community aspiring for fairness. With this development, emerged a social instrument that has now given us all an opportunity to break the hold of ethnocracy in Malaysia and dismantle the ethnic model of politics. We have an opportunity to look beyond that model, the limits of which was reached by the end of the last century.

samy vellu and micOne of the main icons of ethnic politics in Malaysia, the MIC and its head S Samy Vellu, supposedly represented the Indians in BN. But the increasing problems of the community and the inability of the MIC leadership to deal with these adequately only led to the accumulation of disenchantment.

The frustration, humiliation and disappointment Indians (in particular the Tamils) felt intensely was bound to take a social and communal form and it did. Indeed, Makkal Sakthi (people power) has become conscious of itself and its role.

The mainstream media, BN national leaders and Samy Vellu dismissed all these critical developments. One editorial in New Straits Times trivialised the anger of the Indian/Tamil people expressed through Hindraf.

Samy Vellu did not see what was coming his way. He even thought the observation of Thaipusam at Batu Caves was a success when the community knew it was not. He thought

the Indians/Tamil would vote in the MIC leaders to power without carefully listening to the murmurings on the ground even among once-staunch MIC supporters. But it is all to clear now.

The angry Indian/Tamil Malaysians have not only thrown Samy Vellu out of power but have also, directly and with help of other Malaysians, left the MIC in disarray. The party is now actually useless to the Indian Malaysian community, which also does not want MIC to represent it.

### **Common destiny**

MIC cannot now claim to represent Indian Malaysians in the BN and the government. Whatever BN may do to include Indian Malaysians, the BN now cannot claim to run a successful ethnic consociational model of politics.

A new political language needs to be framed. And it must be framed by the new young parliamentarians who will now speak for all of us, including Indian Malaysians.

indian rights demonstration in putrajaya 220807 overview  
Along with many concerned citizens, the Indian Malaysian community has delivered to all Malaysians the opportunity for nurturing a new politics. And in this challenging interim period, they have done that at great risk and further marginalisation as a community, if those who have been elected to power i.e. the opposition, do not subscribe to a politics beyond the ethnic model and beyond ethnocracy or theocracy.

The Indian Malaysian community needs active intervention of parties like the DAP, PKR and PAS (if it really believes that the spirit of Islam is for all) to take up their cause. There is an urgent need to subscribe to politics that sees the problems and needs of Malaysians as the common problems and needs of a people governed by a common destiny.

While needs and problems can be specific to definite Malaysian communities like the Kadazans, Chinese, Indians or Malays, they need to be framed as national problems or needs and addressed with national concern and sensitivity. There is no room for ethnicisation and politicisation of the problems of the citizens, particularly when it involves access to basic goods and services, like water and housing.

For this orientation to really get rooted in Malaysia, we need that new political language of dialogue and inclusiveness urgently, knowing well that it is going to take some time and challenges to institutionalise it.

It is the responsibility of the opposition and the new set of young parliamentarians to give us this as soon as possible. They have to balance their social commitment, the demands of their parties and arrive at a workable minimum programme for inter-party relationship and cooperation.

We are at a threshold of a new future for the future generations and us. Can we nurture, shape and sustain it...together with single-mindedness?