

'Samy Vellu ordered temple demolition'
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Since last October, Dr Mohd Khir Toyo has been tagged as the chief culprit behind the controversial demolition of the Kampung Rimba Jaya Hindu temple near Shah Alam - he now claims that MIC president S Samy Vellu had instructed him to do so.

khir toyo samy vellu and kg rimba jaya temple "Samy Vellu called me on the night of Nov 15 and told me that Hindraf (Hindu Rights Action Force) people had infiltrated the temple and that it must be demolished that night itself," alleged Khir, who was Selangor menteri besar at the time.

In an interview, Khir Toyo also denied that the temple had been pulled down two days before Deepavali, saying the exercise had been carried out a week after the significant Hindu festival.

Furthermore, he said an agreement had been concluded with the priest, in that compensation of RM40,000 would be paid and an alternative site provided to rebuild the temple.

The incident has been cited by both opposition and Barisan Nasional (BN) members as a key factor in influencing the outcome of the March 8 polls.

BN and Umno took the brunt of voter anger over this and other issues, resulting in the state government falling into opposition hands for the first time in electoral history. Khir then resigned as Selangor Umno head, and is now leader of the opposition in the state legislature.

mbsa temple evidence 031107 film strip The demolition of the Sri Maha Mariamman temple was carried out in two stages, albeit not intentionally. As the illegal extension was being pulled down on Oct 30, a violent fracas ensued between devotees and enforcement personnel and forced work to be abandoned.

The original 100-year-old structure was demolished later - apparently on Nov 15, based on Khir's account during the interview. Deepavali fell on Nov 8 last year.

Samy Vellu had shown up at the site after the illegal extension was torn down, but was reportedly pelted with sticks and stones by angry residents.

He then issued an unprecedented statement urging an end to such incidents, warning that the government risked losing Indian Malaysian votes. Although he also banned MIC elected representatives from holding the traditional Deepavali open house as a mark of protest, he quickly rescinded the order.

The following excerpts of the interview with Khir have been edited for clarity.

The temple incident in Kampung Rimba Jaya was said to be a major cause of BN's downfall and you have been blamed for it.

I would like to explain. The court, after three years of deliberation, decided that it was time to remove the temple as the flats that were being built there were nearing completion and people were ready to move in. The court decided that it was time to remove not just the temple but a surau and some squatter houses.

On the day itself, I was told that the surau had been demolished and (the enforcement team) was stopped at the gate of the temple.

rimba jaya temple 021107 back portion Samy Vellu then met me and (premier) Abdullah Ahmad Badawi at the Blue Wave hotel (in Shah Alam) and we all agreed to stop the demolition process at the temple gate. Samy then made an announcement in Rimba Jaya, (asking) not to demolish the temple because in two days, the people would evacuate the site.

Now the purported version is that the Selangor government on my instructions had demolished the temple two days before Deepavali, and this is incorrect. As I said, the agreement to stop the demolition was agreed to by all parties and was witnessed by many others. When I visited Rimba Jaya after that, the temple was intact.

A week after Deepavali - not two days before - Samy Vellu called me on the night of Nov 15 and told me that Hindraf people had infiltrated the temple and that it must be demolished that night itself. And that's what we did - so it wasn't before Deepavali.

The demolition was done with the agreement of the temple priest and the relevant people were then given replacement land to rebuild the temple and were compensated with RM40,000. I didn't tell this to the media before, but now that I have been blamed for it, I must explain. Samy was the one who told me to do it.

You have made this explanation before. Now the question is why your explanation is not generally accepted while the Hindraf contention has become the sole angle adopted by the Indian Malaysian community.

khir toyo interview 280408 02Hindraf does not just talk about temple issues only. The group also protested against the government's inability to address other problems faced by the community like Tamil schools, education, employment, housing and poverty. What is demanded by Hindraf is more than temple- related matters..

The issue of price hikes had been consistently highlighted by the media, way before the general elections. Did you as menteri besar and BN Selangor chief discuss this matter with the central leaders?

Yes, we did. We suggested to the government to reduce the price of oil and stop other projects. But as a mere state leader I cannot make any decisions.

But the opposition has been riding on this issue and has consistently associated BN with price hikes. Why didn't BN respond effectively?

I myself don't understand. We had suggested to the federal government that the oil price be reduced, but they did not respond. Instead they believed in explaining (the issue) to the people, and the people don't want to hear that.

As we remember it, the matter was discussed in depth by BN - this means the party had

sufficient time to respond to the matter...

Suggestions were made, but there was no reaction. Point taken, but where were the responses?

Are you saying that there are no state issues that caused the electoral losses?

bn and selangor vote Not many. The biggest issue in Selangor is public transportation which renders it a must for everyone to own a car. Almost all the households in Selangor have a car, you can see low-cost houses with two or three cars (parked outside) because there is no efficient public transportation system. (It is) something that I have been fighting to get for a long time.

Light Rail Transit projects go only halfway because of insufficient funding. When there is a station, it's so far from people's houses that they end up buying cars. We actually have a plan to purchase houses and land near train stations, no matter how expensive it is, so we can build low- cost housing, but I can't say it because I will be accused of trying to teach the government how to run things.

Tomorrow: On the 'broom' award

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