

Najib defends Zul Noordin as champion of Indian issues
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SHAH ALAM, April 22 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak described Datuk Zulkifli Noordin today as a champion of Indian issues in Shah Alam where the Perkasa vice-president is contesting in Election 2013.

The Barisan Nasional (BN) chairman's defence of the controversial candidate comes even as MIC leader S. Vell Paari warned the ruling coalition recently that the Malay rights leader would cost BN Selangor in the May 5 polls.

"I've spoken to quite a number of Indians and they're supporting him," said the caretaker prime minister in a press conference at the Concorde Hotel here today.

"He's already championed some issues pertaining to the Indian community in Shah Alam, like a Tamil school and another temple in Shah Alam," added the Selangor BN chairman.

Vell Paari said last Wednesday that BN was risking the Indian vote by fielding Zulkifli, which he said would likely become the deciding vote in states like Selangor that Pakatan Rakyat (PR) had won in Election 2008.

Zulkifli will be contesting in the Malay-majority state capital against incumbent Shah Alam MP Khalid Samad, who is seen as a progressive voice in PAS.

Vell Paari, the son of former MIC chief Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, also noted that there are some 15,000 Indian voters in Shah Alam; 31,000 in Kota Raja; 21,000 in Kapar; and 17,000 in Subang, many of whom he said were angered by Najib's selection of Zulkifli, who had allegedly insulted the Hindu community.

Najib, however, dismissed Zulkifli's actions as "history", noting that the former PAS man had apologised over his remarks.

Najib also hit out at the Selangor government for demolishing seven Hindu temples in the country's wealthiest state.

"Isn't that more serious? More of a slap to the Hindus than what Zulkifli Noordin said 10 years ago when he was in PAS?" he said.

"They even destroyed a private temple in Sepang. That is worse, a thousand times worse than what Zulkifli Noordin has done," added Najib.

A video of Zulkifli uttering the word "Keling", which Malaysians of Indian descent consider derogatory, went viral recently, just days after another video was released in which he questioned an Indian trader on why Hindu gods did not prevent the man's shop from being flooded, drawing the wrath of Hindus.

Once a lawyer for opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Zulkifli had also questioned the purity of the Ganges River in India that is considered sacred by Hindus.

Zulkifli became a BN-friendly Independent MP and critical of the opposition when he was dismissed from PKR on March 6, 2010 over a police report he lodged against Khalid.

Umno's Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Shamsuddin lost to Khalid in Election 2008 with a 9,314-vote majority. In 2004, he had won against Khalid with a 13,410-vote majority.

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