

Don't disrupt peace and harmony

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FORCE was very much on the minds of the organisers of the recent illegal demonstration when they cobbled together their creation called the Hindu Rights Action Force.

Hindraf is an unregistered, illegal organisation which has shown its dual objectives — disruption of the peace and harmony that the rest of us are working hard to maintain, and incitement of racial hatred.

The class action suit against the British government was in the event a red herring to feed the greed of the gullible. The country has every right to expect the government to deal decisively under the law with the threats to national security, peace and prosperity posed by Hindraf.

We, all of us, whether individuals or groups of individuals, no matter where in the world, are never completely happy with our lot, and we quite rightly look to the leadership to remedy and put matters right.

The management of our national affairs, on the whole, is in reasonably good hands; the government, to its credit, readily admits that it is not perfect.

From my vantage point as a governance watcher, and I hope a fair critic, I know the government listens and does provide mechanisms and avenues for dealing with our grievances, real or imagined. Service delivery is really the devil in the detail, and I am reasonably happy with the very positive steps being taken by the chief secretary to improve it.

Many argue against any regulation requiring organisers of street demonstrations to obtain a police permit. I am all for democratic principles and practices, but I am of a generation that has seen some of the worst excesses occasioned by the Japanese invasion, the communist uprising, the Indonesian confrontation, the bloody riots in Singapore in the 1950s and 1960s, which started off as “peaceful” processions, and the May 13 bloody race riots, which blotted, to our eternal shame, our copy book and our proud template for managing race relations.

We must never ever allow that massacre of our people to revisit on the peace-loving, innocent citizens of



our country. While it is not my intention to dredge out of the murky past those responsible for the May 13, 1969 journey through the gates of hell, those on both sides of the political divide must accept responsibility for what happened, and what happened remains a national disgrace to all of us.

We, humans, thrive on contradictions. We go to war in order to preserve peace, so we claim. The American war in Iraq is a good example of political manipulations of the most unholy kind. The intended outcome was supposed to bring democracy to the Middle East, beginning with Iraq.

The lawyers who hatched and manipulated Hindraf for their own diabolical purpose are determined, like others before them, to exploit religion and their version of democracy to the hilt.

We have seen all too frequently the bloody Hindu-Muslim massacres in India, that great democracy which has still not succeeded in taming the evils of religious fanaticism.

It is obvious to me where Hindraf derives its main inspiration from — the foreign countries it has tried to persuade to intervene in our internal affairs through its shabby bundle of blatant lies about ethnic cleansing on the spurious ground that a place of worship was demolished. What was not mentioned was that the temple was constructed illegally.

The institutions and mechanisms which are in place as part of our constitutional arrangements are intended to protect our democratic rights as citizens in partnership with those whom we elect freely every five years to govern us. The government is responsible for peace, racial harmony, security, public order and sustainable all-round development.

If things went horribly wrong and innocent lives were lost because of the folly of a handful of wayward



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lawyers in search of notoriety, it would not be the governments of India, the United Kingdom or the United States that would be responsible for our continued well-being or existence as a nation.

It would be our own government that we put in place in a free national election. Whether our elections are fair is a moot point, but there is an avenue for representations on that score to be made without our taking to the streets.

In a multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-cultural nation such as ours, we must get our democratic priorities right. I have yet to know where in the world absolute democracy is practised, and if you can tell me the name of that heaven on earth, I will be there like a shot, even as an illegal immigrant.

In a country with absolute democratic freedom, presumably, I will not be detained and ill-treated because of the protection I am entitled to under the provisions of the UN Human Rights Convention.

Alas, such a country only exists in the tortured and twisted minds of those driven and blinded by racial hatred and disdain for stability and good order. I find it extremely dis-

tasteful that people who demand their democratic rights at the drop of a hat, turban or *songkok* or whatever they wear see nothing morally or ethically wrong in bad-mouthing their country in the world arena.

Loyalty is not their strong point. They are unable to differentiate between their country and the government which has the legitimacy to govern the country in accordance with the laws of the land.

For me, it is simple; my country right or wrong. If I am unhappy with the way the government conducts its affairs as they affect my country, I criticise the government, but I leave my country out of it.

It was the same in 1987 when “Ops Lalang” was launched. A Malaysian legal luminary whose racial origin is not important in this case was the first to turn up knocking at the door of Carlton House; Marlborough House was then undergoing extensive renovation, to seek the Commonwealth Secretariat’s intervention.

The Secretary-General, Shridath Ramphal, an eminent lawyer and diplomat, listened to him politely and told him to exhaust internal remedies. Our five not-so-learned friends of Hindraf fame should follow that

advice and save us all a lot of inconvenience and gallons of water used by the police water artillery division.

Considering the threat to national security, and the danger posed by Hindraf, the government must confront the evil influence of this rebel organisation courageously and swiftly as provided under the law, to the fullest extent possible.

It would be wrong for the government to deal with an illegal rabble set up under duress because it will then be seen to be negotiating from a position of weakness.

That said, the problems arising from both the legal and illegal activities are a wider manifestation of a sense of perceived or even real grievance. It would be easy if they would just fade away, but they won’t, and doing nothing to address the issues now emerging will be simply postponing the evil day.

I believe that as part of better managing the apparently serious policy concerns about poverty alleviation, an Independent Commission for Racial Equality should be set up to listen to complaints and suggestions, with powers to require government ministries and agencies to account for the way in which policies are implemented to achieve the objectives of equality of treatment, irrespective of race, colour or creed.

The commission would be in the best position to make recommendations to the government based on research findings on how the problems of grassroots economic and social marginalisation should be tackled.

I know there are other existing organisations such as the Human Rights Commission, but what the proposed commission should do is to go beyond aspects of human rights per se, and to be more specific and focused in its approach to fighting poverty. It is a mechanism whose time has come.

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