

**DEMANDS**  
**OF**  
**INDIAN MALAYSIANS**  
**FOR A BETTER FUTURE**

# **Demands of Indian Malaysians For A Better Future**

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We the Indian Malaysian citizens of this country make the following demands after careful evaluation of our present socio-economic, political and cultural situations against the background of British colonialism, forty two years of *Merdeka* and nine general elections.

Our demands range from those specific to the Indian community to issues that involve all other communities in the country. We believe that the solutions to a number of critical problems facing Indian Malaysians can only be resolved within a national framework and with the resolution of similar, if not the same, problems faced by all Malaysians. In short, the destiny of the Indian community is intimately tied to the fate of all the other communities in the country.

What is clear is that the resolution of our problems and the attainment of our aspirations would require an alternative development strategy that is truly caring and just. Broadly, this would entail a non-communal political system and a development strategy centered on notions of equitable distribution of wealth, democracy, justice and spiritual growth. The demands made here are a step in that direction.

Our demands are presented below in the universal spirit sanctified in all civilisations that seeks fairness and justice.

## Political

1) The political rights of all Malaysians can be protected by a non-communal political system. This is particularly true for the Indian Malaysian community. The communal political structure has alienated the Indian Malaysians along with other minority communities from the centers of economic and political power. The communal political system identifies and categorises problems and solutions faced by Malaysians in terms of their ethnic groupings. Such a tendency leads to the unhealthy practice of interpreting national problems as communal problems. For example, the problems of the Indian Malaysians are seen as problems internal to the community, leading to the conclusion that the problems are within the community requiring solutions within the community. It is important to note that the problem of the Indian Malaysian community is the outcome of the developmental process starting with British colonialism running through the policies of our national government.

1.1) We therefore demand institutionalisation of non-communal politics that is sensitive to the problems faced by Malaysians, particularly the poor. This entails the recognition of problems faced by poor Malaysians from a national perspective as opposed to a communal-based perspective. More specifically, it needs to recognise the problems of the poor Malaysians as arising from ill-conceived development policies as national problems rather than communal problems.

1.2) In the interim period of the transition from communal to non-communal politics, we demand reservation of seats for Indian Malaysians and other minorities in decision making bodies at all levels of government, especially in local councils and special authorities to represent Indian Malaysians and other minorities. The representation of Indian Malaysians need to be open to not only politicians but also to informal leaders and other responsible members of the community.

1.3) In the interim period of the transition, we also demand that more business opportunities be made available immediately to the Indian Malaysians and other minority groups to reduce the income disparity between the Indian community vis-a-vis the Chinese and Malays through efforts that should entail a larger allocation of permits, contracts and a larger financial allocation. Thus we seek an emergency financial allocation for Indian Malaysian-based small and medium industries.

2) People are born with certain inalienable rights like right to freedom of expression and assembly. These rights are not gifts or handouts from any government but it is a responsibility of all democratic governments to protect these rights. The rights of all Malaysians must be protected by the government. There must be avenues for negotiating the terms of these rights. While rights have been enshrined in the constitution, implementation has always been a problem.



Democracy operates only when peoples' rights are recognised. Platitudes on democracy will be of no use unless institutions allow expression of these rights, particularly when dealing with issues related to problems of development, problems of poverty, powerlessness, discrimination, police abuse of power, all of which involves serious discussions and criticisms. Such kind of discussions or criticisms can take place under two conditions: democratisation and freedom of the press. Only in the context of a democratic environment in which there is a responsible and free press can there be active and fearless criticisms and dialogue which may be contrary to the government view. Such an environment will discourage monologue and encourage an active dialogue and a robust civil society which will give rise to a multiplicity of ideas, views and alternatives. Serious issues like poverty needs the input of the government guided by the active participation of civil society.

2.1) To realise these objectives, we demand that the Internal Security Act be repealed and that democratic practices be institutionalised so that citizens, particularly marginalised and powerless citizens, can voice and mobilise their opinion in a non-threatening atmosphere.

2.2) We further demand that conditions be created for a free and responsible press, which includes the repealing of the Printing Press and Publications Act, particularly the law requiring newspapers to apply for printing permits every year.

2.3) Since mainstream media organisations are corporate entities linked to political parties of the ruling coalition there is always a possibility of bias reporting and negating notion of fairness and accuracy in reporting. The issue of irresponsibility must be ascertained by an independent body. In order to ensure that the media remains truly free, fair and responsible, we demand the establishment of a National Press Council, comprising representatives from the government, media, and civil society.

2.4) We demand the right to peaceful assembly be given as a matter of right. In view of the need to maintain public order, the security institutions need only be informed of the intention to hold the assembly.

2.5) With regards to the behaviour of the police in dealing with suspected criminals in which there is a social recognition of excessive use of force including summary killing of them, we demand that a due transparent and a public process is in place to monitor, to investigate and to deal with officers of law who tarnish the name of the security agencies.

2.6) While the national government may not be involved in the daily expression of rights, bureaucrats are. There have been cases where bureaucrats have been hurdles to the expression of rights, for example cultural and religious rights. We demand that there be a permanent commission, comprising representatives of the government and civil society, to monitor, investigate, discipline and retrain erring bureaucrats who infringe the rights of ethnic minorities, particularly cultural and religious rights.

2.7) To overcome any tendency for forced assimilation or marginalisation of certain cultural heritage of Malaysians, we demand that cultural rights, including mother tongue education, of the different ethnic communities be protected in any formulation of national culture.

2.8) Given the fact that there are a number of minority communities, including Indian Malaysians, we demand the formulation of the Minorities Protection Act, a legislation to protect the interests and rights of minorities in the political, economic, social, cultural and religious spheres.

2.8a) Further, we demand the constitution of a Minorities Protection Commission comprising the government and members of civil society and the minority communities to oversee the Minorities Protection Act.

## Economic

### (I) Workers

3) Given the fact that workers in certain sectors are not allowed to form national unions which results in the violation of their right to freedom of association, we demand that their rights be restored and that all workers are protected by recognising their right to association which goes beyond in-house unions.

3.1) Given the fact that minimum wages for workers are not fixed and that there are many workers whose wages are uncertain, below daily subsistence level wage rate, we demand monitoring of this situation and formulation of specific laws setting the basic minimum living wage and adjusted to the Consumer Price Index periodically.

3.2a) Given that plantation workers are still paid daily rated wages, we demand that the government intervenes and introduces a minimum monthly living wage as a specific instance of a minimum monthly wage for all workers.

3.2b) Given that many plantation owners are ignoring the home ownership policy for plantation workers, we demand that:

- (A) the government makes it mandatory for plantation owners to build homes following the standards and requirements set by the government;
- (B) these homes be not built in isolated areas but located within close proximity to city or town centers that provide adequate public amenities like educational facilities, job opportunities and other avenues of upward mobility;
- (C) plantation owners who sell their plantations for commercial and other development activities provide alternate housing facilities or allocate funds to individual workers for the purchase of low cost housing;



- (D) the plantation owners in association with the government develop housing townships or cluster residential centers to cater for the housing needs of plantation workers involving a number of adjacent and nearby estates; and
- (E) outright compensation of the value of a low cost house

3.2c) Given the fact that Malaysia is undergoing rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, there will be trends that will effect community of workers like the Indian Malaysian plantation workers, we demand that the government organises a department that monitors such trends and propose plans to alleviate the problems that may be faced by such community of workers like for instances retraining and reskilling these workers to enter another or new sectors of the economy.

3.2d) Since large numbers of plantation workers are being displaced, there is a need to manage this movement from rural to urban areas. It's therefore imperative that these groups of people are provided training and reskilling and social skills for urban living. The government should look into allocating funds for these group of people to go into small businesses.

3.3) There is a labour shortage in Malaysia and therefore there is a demand for skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled foreign labour. In particular the employment of unskilled labour has implications for local labour and industrial relations. For instance, unskilled labour are not allowed to join unions and there is a tendency to overexploit them. Furthermore there is an inclination by Malaysian employers to use unskilled foreign labour to depress wages of local workers. Therefore we demand:

3.3a) that legislations be introduced so that the foreign workers are not employed at the expense of local workers. Foreign workers should be employed only in sectors where there is an acute labour shortage and should not be used to depress the wages of local workers, whose minimum living wage must be protected by law (see demand 3.1).

3.3b) that where foreign workers are employed they benefit from a Malaysian sense of justice and are treated on par with local workers, enjoying the same wages, union membership and social security.

## **(II) Privatisation and Corporatisation**

3.4) Given that privatisation and corporatisation has become an economic burden particularly to the poor and is inefficient, we demand that the government reconsiders its privatisation policy and immediately nationalises those services that are essential to human life such as water, electricity, education, and health services, etc.

3.4a) Health care is a fundamental right of all citizens. Corporatisation of government hospitals will make health care costly and inaccessible to the poor communities. Therefore, we demand that the government provide free health care for the people.

### (III) Poverty Eradication

4) Though Malaysia has had a vibrant economy, the redistribution of wealth has been skewed and the disparities are becoming greater. In spite of the economy doing well, we have a large number of poor Malaysians from all ethnic groups. While it is understandable affirmative action policy has addressed the problems of the poor Malays, it's time that the nation also considers the poor of other communities, in particular Indian Malaysians.

4.1) Just as the affirmative action policy has helped transform the economic status of the Malay community, we demand that such a policy be extended to the poorer sections of the Indian Malaysian community and other minority communities. Such an objective can be achieved if the basis for affirmative action for the poor is changed from an ethnic one to an economic one. We also propose with this the need to put the extended affirmative action policy within a framework and a commission that will have the power to organise a definite time-bound process to dismantle it.

4.2) Keeping this in mind, we demand a National Commission For Poverty Eradication comprising experts and representatives from all political parties, communities, women's groups and non-governmental organisations be set up to monitor poverty among all Malaysians and to formulate poverty eradication programmes based on an economic criteria which should therefore target all the poor from all communities.

4.3) In this regard, we further demand that poverty eradication programme through *Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia* be extended to cover all hard core poor Malaysians.

4.4) Furthermore, given the success of the *Amanah Saham Bumiputera* - Program Pembangunan Rakyat Termiskin (ASB-PPRT) loan scheme, we demand that a similar scheme be extended to cover all economically disadvantaged Malaysians irrespective of their levels of poverty.

### (IV) Employment Discrimination

5) In Malaysia a number of important sectors of government are largely monoethnic, both in terms of numbers and senior positions held. In a multiracial society this creates an unhealthy situation which involves a feeling of discrimination, reduced involvement in national life, a disparity between skill ability and opportunity. We therefore demand that efforts be taken to influence the civil service and other important sectors of the government to ensure that minority communities are adequately represented at all levels, especially the middle and upper categories in areas of policy planning and implementation.



6) Presently, there exists racial discrimination, both retail and institutional. The workplace is one sphere where many young Indian Malaysians have experienced racial discrimination. Like the 'glass ceiling' experienced by women as an invisible obstacle to their career development, many Indian Malaysians also face similar obstacles in their career path. Like the proposed Sex Discrimination Act, we demand the creation of an Equal Opportunity Employment Commission, supported by legislation, to ensure and safeguard minorities and women from any kind of discrimination from employers.

## Women

7) In addition to facing the double oppression of being woman and poor, poor Indian Malaysian women are also faced with the problem of being *Indian* Malaysian. Given this situation, we demand that Indian women be given equal opportunity and other definite institutional support that will contribute to their social and economic independence and their active participation in important societal decision-making processes.

7.1) Given the problem of women-headed single parent families, particularly among the Malay and Indian communities, we demand the monitoring of this situation and special assistance to these families, particularly those in the lower-income category.

## Education

8) In Malaysia education is being progressively privatised or corporatised, both of which makes education out of reach for a large number of poor Malaysians if not completely at least at different levels. Education should be a right of every citizen. A sound education besides providing a foundation for good citizenship, also provides an avenue for an upward social mobility for economically disadvantaged Malaysians. There is therefore a need to consider all aspects in order to make education an achievable right. Mother tongue education must be given due recognition and support so that children of ethnic minorities who opt for such education do not suffer from lack of facilities.

8.1) Therefore we demand the establishment of a commission comprising representatives of the government and civil society that will monitor and gauge the educational needs of economically disadvantaged communities and propose suitable and timely educational intervention programmes.

8.2) We demand that early childhood development programmes organised through the various ministries and government agencies also reach out to plantation worker communities, squatter settlements and low-cost housing areas and to all ethnic groups. For the benefit of the child in its formative years, these programmes should be in the language of the local community.



- 8.3) Given that we are faced with prejudice along ethnic and gender lines, we demand that the content of textbooks for Malaysian children are acutely sensitive to these issues and avoid the stereotyping of ethnic groups and women in terms of racial characteristics or role specificities.
- 8.4) Given the fact the making of modern Malaysia is the result of the struggles of various communities, we demand that the writing of Malaysian history and Malaysian history books for school children reflect this richness.
- 8.5) We demand that all the existing pre-school teachers and child minders in the plantation worker community and squatter settlements be recognised, trained and placed within in a national salaried scheme under the government.
- 8.6) We demand that education be made mandatory for all Malaysian children till lower secondary or till young Malaysians are of 15 or 16 years of age. For children from poor Malaysian families, the responsibility to ensure their education should be shared by both the families and the government.
- 8.7) Because of the poverty situation and insufficient government-aided opportunities in hard skill training, we demand that the government intervenes in this and upgrades the opportunities and institutions for hard skill training particularly for children from economically disadvantaged communities like Indian Malaysians where the responsibility for taking care of the family come very early in life and where there is seeking of opportunities to get out of poverty.
- 8.8) We demand that all government-aided Tamil primary schools be made *Bantuan Penuh* (fully aided) and be given equal status as national schools in terms of allocation, developmental expansion, IT facilities, training programmes and all other forms of support.
- 8.9) We demand that alternative schools be built prior to the closing down of any Tamil school.
- 8.10) Given the poor economic and educational background of a significant proportion of parents of children going to Tamil schools, we demand that the government takes an active part in strengthening the Parent-Teachers Association in Tamil schools. This should involve both financial support and training in social skills of parents in providing support for the intellectual development of their children.
- 8.11) In the interim period (refer to demand 1.1) before moving into a non-communal polity and society, we demand that Indian Malaysians be reserved places in residential schools, vocational training centers and institutions of higher learning in proportion to the size of the poor in the community.

8.12) Given that there exist numerous non-profit private technical and vocational educational centers that caters for the needs of non-Malay poor and which are in financial distress, we demand that the government intervene to financially support such institutions so that the poor students benefit.

8.13) We demand that Tamil be offered as a subject up to tertiary level of education and supported to allow Tamil literary research, training and teaching.

8.14) We demand that the 'pupils own language' (POL) scheme in national primary and secondary schools be replaced by mandatory 'mother tongue education'.

## Housing

9) There is a tendency for property developers to neglect the construction of affordable houses for the economically disadvantaged. Though the government has set targets for low-cost houses, this has never been achieved. This and the affirmative action policy in the allocation of low-cost houses has compounded the problem of ownership of low-cost housing for many economically disadvantaged Malaysians, in particular Indian Malaysians.

9.1) Given this situation, we demand that the low-cost housing targets are met and a greater democratisation of the allocation in order to meet the housing needs of all poor Malaysians. This would mean that the government sets a target of achieving within a defined period, one house for every low-income Malaysian household.

9.2) We demand that both the federal and state governments provide loans at low interest rates for poor Indian Malaysians and others to buy low-cost houses.

9.3) Given the fact that there are Malaysians who are hard-core poor i.e. "the poorest among the poor" who are unable to purchase a homes at the present rate of RM 25,000, we demand that a strategy be put forward which would entail government purchase of the low cost house on behalf of this group and a long drawn, interest free repayment scheme which can be tied such schemes as referred to in 4.2 and 4.3.

## Religion and Culture

10) The culture and religious practices of Malaysians are rich and diverse. This demands a healthy attitude towards cultural pluralism. Only a non-communal approach will provide this healthy attitude. This would mean that the national cultural policy must be carefully developed within a non-communal framework so that every Malaysian will learn to appreciate and accept other's cultural and religious practices. This process should be further strengthened by the national policy for racial integration.

10.1) The Hindu worship pattern and construction of places of worship follow a certain cultural logic. In a number of cases the construction of Hindu temples has been unfortunately on state land. In addition, in a fast developing Malaysia, communities have been displaced. For Indian Malaysians, this means leaving behind their place of worship. Both these realities threaten the religious aspirations of Hindu Malaysians, often leading to demolition of the temples much to the dismay of the Hindu community. To deal with this problem, we demand that:

10.1a) No places of worship, in particular Hindu temples, be demolished.

10.1b) Temples on state land but with a long established history and an active community of worshippers be legalized.

10.1c) Temples on state land which have become mere icons be relocated or dismantled after deliberations with local community leaders with due process in place and strictly observed.

10.2) In new residential areas, we demand that land for places of worship be allocated.

10.2b) After the first two years of a new residential area coming into being when communities are formed, we demand that places of worship be built to meet the religious need of the communities.

10.3) Excessive marketisation of the media has marginalised the infotainment and cultural needs of the economically weak minorities. There is a need to maintain a focus on ethnic media as part of a social political agenda of the national government in order to achieve greater democratisation of media programming for minority communities. To realise this we demand the institutionalisation of an ethnic minority media commission.

10.4) We believe that religion and spiritual development should be at the center to human life. Thus, we demand that all religious teachings be provided equal access and time over the public electronic channels. Besides creating inter-religious understanding and harmony, this effort will enhance spiritual growth among followers of various religions in the country and go a long way to institutionalise the first tenet of the Rukun Negera.

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