

**Tenang Indians' blind love for BN**  
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The soaring price of rubber and palm oil has brought windfall to the residents of Tenang, with some Chinese estate owners and Malay Felda settlers reaping a monthly income of RM10,000.

However, most of the Indians voters in Tenang are struggling with rising living costs while still stuck with their monthly RM600 pay from giant plantation companies. Labis Utara estate is one such Indian estate settlement in the constituency. Some 30 families are residing in their tiny yellow houses with two rooms, provided by their employer, Sime Darby.

This British colony heritage - providing free basic accommodation to workers and their families with meagre wage - has trapped the Indian community in poverty for three generations.

Although the official working hours are from 7am to 2pm, most are forced to toil overtime for the extra RM4 per hour, in order to hit the RM1,000 monthly income mark.

Those in other estates within the constituency namely Sungai Labis estate, Voules estate and Bukit Datok estates, display the same undying faith in the system.

**Woeful living conditions**

Labis Utara estate is only a 10-minute drive from Labis town but a large part of the road leading to the estate remains unpaved and is sometimes inundated after day-long rains, cutting the residents' only access to town.

Despite the poor living conditions, a visit to Labis Utara by Malaysiakini found that many of the voters there remain staunch BN supporters.

To them, the BN and MIC are their only hope and the free accommodation, 50 percent school transport subsidy for their children and free public medical service are more than enough to ensure their loyalty.

They were well aware that the Felda settlers' living standards have risen over the past 30 years compared to their stagnation, but the idea of switching their loyalty to the opposition had apparently never crossed their mind.

"The MIC is more reliable than my own children," said P Kunasegaran, 51, (right) who lost the ability to walk in an accident in 1995.

He added that supporting the BN is the bequest left to him by his late father.

"Before he died, he asked me to support the BN. I have voted five or six times for the BN. I also asked my children to support the BN."

**Abandoned parents' total faith**

The father of six, who now relies on his wife who earns RM400 as a cleaner at the Sime Darby office, said all his children had abandoned their parents.

"That's why I say the BN and MIC are more reliable than my children. I will never support others. When I met with the accident, it was an MIC member who sent me to the hospital."

Asked whether the government could have helped out his community through a scheme similar to that of Felda, Kunasegaran hesitated awhile but still maintained his loyalty.

"Even if that's the case, I'm still thankful to the government. Hinduism teaches us to appreciate even the smallest help. Former MIC president S Samy Vellu is like my god."

As for M Devi, 36, who earns RM400 a month as a Sime Darby office assistant, her reason for supporting the ruling coalition is simple - her employer had paid for her medical bill twice, when she gave birth to her two children at the Segamat government hospital.

### **Life jacket promise feeds faith**

Her husband S Narayan, 45, has more reasons to support the BN as the MIC had assisted him to land him a cleaner's job with Johor waste management contractor, Southern Waste.

"Before that I was a worker in an oil palm estate. I'm the envy of many people in this area! I can earn up to RM1,300 a month if I work overtime."

Another couple, M Panirselpam, 49, and R Santhi, are the third generation of estate workers here.

They were both with Sime Darby estate earning a total monthly income of RM1,000 before Santhi (left) was diagnosed with Osteophytes (a type of bone spur, or bony projections that form along joints) which forced her to stop working.

"Earlier the MIC had promised that they would assist children who could get into higher education institutions. This is quite attractive to me because I want my children to be freed from such poverty," said Panirselpam.