

**Orang Asli tell Najib: Take stand against Mahathir**  
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Representatives of the Orang Asli community want Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak to take a stand on the community's rights, following a damning statement by former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Speaking to reporters at a joint press conference with the Bar Council, Peninsular Malaysia Orang Asli Network coordinator Tijah Yok Chopil called on Najib to put his foot down to prove that his 1Malaysia call is not empty propaganda.

"I am demanding that the '1Malaysia prime minister' tells people like (Mahathir) to stop such behaviour, which will only drive wedges among us," she said.

Mahathir had on his blog on March 11 said the Malay community's claim to the land is stronger than the Orang Asli's as the latter do not have a civilisation that pre-dates the Malays.

Visibly upset, Tijah (seated centre) said Najib by distancing himself from the Mahathir's "hurtful" comments would have the opportunity to show where his administration stood on Orang Asli rights - a matter he has thus far been silent on.

"We have never asked for more than what we rightfully own, nor have we ever denied the special position of the Malays.

"The only people who appear to be putting down the rights of others while trumpeting their own special position are the Malay leaders."

**'Mahathir is wrong'**

Besides being "insulting", Bar Council president Lim Chee Wee said, the former PM's statement was also legally and morally wrong.

Judgments in the Sagong Tasi case, in which the Court of Appeal recognised the Orang Asli as the "first people" of the land, as well as in several other Federal Court and Appeal Court cases, recognise the propriety interest of the Orang Asli in the land, Lim said.

He noted that Malaysia had voted in favour of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People which, among others, mandates the state to protect land rights and stop discrimination against indigenous peoples.

We respect Mahathir's freedom of speech, but at the same time he cannot say things that are... plain and simply wrong," the Bar Council's Human Rights Committee chairperson Andrew Khoo said.

According to Centre for Orang Asli Concerns coordinator Colin Nicholas, it was only with the help of the Orang Asli that the Malay civilisation emerged.

"The Johor sultanate was supported by the Orang Laut ,while in Negri Sembilan, you cannot become an undang if you don't have Orang Asli blood in your mother's line," Colin said.

Mahathir's statement, he said, did not differ from what he had said in his 1975 book 'The Malay Dilemma' and that the retired politician had only been friendly with the Orang Asli at election periods during his tenure as prime minister.

"He is not saying this out of ignorance but from a position of power, which is reflective of arrogance and self-interest. He is not stupid... he is saying this because he thinks the Orang Asli will not challenge him," Colin (right) said.

He said it was not Mahathir who should be the cause of worry despite his upsetting comments but Najib, whose cabinet was pursuing policies that were dangerous to the Orang Asli community.

"Najib has not said anything on any memorandum submitted by the Orang Asli, and this is despite being elected in Pekan, which has a significant number of Orang Asli constituents.

"The real danger is Najib, who is keeping quiet but (whose administration) is making changes to the law," Colin (right) added.

### **'Regressive move'**

According to the Bar Council's Orang Asli Rights Committee deputy chairperson Steven Thiru, the government last year expressed its intention to amend the Aboriginal Peoples' Act 1954.

"The Orang Asli and the Bar Council were not consulted, but from what we understand, the proposed amendment can reverse court decisions (on land matters involving the Orang Asli).

"This is an extremely regressive move... it is not just about changing land titles but changing lives because customs and livelihood of the Orang Asli are all tied to land," Thiru said.

Besides this, the Najib administration was also pursuing an amendment to the National Land Act, which experts claim would give the Orang Asli in the peninsula only 50,000 ha of the 129,000ha that they claim as rightfully theirs.

More than 2,000 Orang Asli were on March 17 last year stopped from marching to the Prime Minister's Department in Putrajaya in a rare protest against what they deemed to be the government's unfair land policy.

The protest, dubbed the biggest Orang Asli demonstration in history by Colin, was stopped by a contingent of police officers 15 minutes after it took off.

Minister of Rural Development Shafie Apdal later met with the demonstrators and claims that they were actually there for sightseeing.