

**Indians tipped to desert BN tomorrow**  
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Indian Malaysians are expected to end 50 years of allegiance to the ruling coalition in Saturday polls as allegations of neglect and discrimination reach a crescendo. MCPX

Herding his cows along the roads of this rural outpost, 73-year-old R Cenyah seems an unlikely candidate for a political awakening, but he is one of many in the disadvantaged community who say they have had enough.

"I am angry with this government. This year I will vote for the opposition for the first time," he told AFP, still wearing the T-shirt emblazoned with the emblem of the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition he was given years ago.

"My village floods when it rains heavily. Nothing is done to address it," he said in this sleepy district southwest of the capital Kuala Lumpur, where many Indians work in the palm oil plantations and in nearby factories.

"Promises are not carried out. I applied for a land grant for the past three decades without any results. But the ethnic Malays apply and they get it within five years."

BN, dominated by the Muslim Malays who make up some 60 percent of the multicultural nation's population, is assured of another victory in Saturday's elections but its majority is expected to be clipped.

In 2004 it won 90 percent of parliamentary seats, but this year voters are angry over inflation, rising crime and racial tensions that are seething among its minority Indian and Chinese citizens.

### **Anger targeted at MIC**

Ethnic Indian activists last year mounted unprecedented public protests claiming discrimination against the community, saying it is denied opportunities in education and employment.

Anger has been targeted at MIC, a coalition member which has been criticised for failing to advance the cause of its constituents.

Batang Berjuntai was once an MIC stronghold, but many here say they will now vote for opposition parties including former deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim's PKR or even the Islamic party PAS.

They are particularly incensed over the demolition of hundreds of Hindu temples in Malaysia in recent years, steamrolled to make way for development projects.

Analysts said Saturday's ballot will see a shift among Indian voters who have never before been a factor in elections.

"I feel there will be some erosion of support in favour of the opposition," said political observer Chandra Muzaffar from University Sains Malaysia.

"It is quite possible some candidates of the Malaysian Indian Congress may lose. The party president S Samy Vellu's own position may be vulnerable," he said.

Samy Vellu, Malaysia's only ethnic Indian minister, has led the MIC for some three decades, but in recent months has been heckled and abused at public events and faced mounting calls to quit.

### **Votes key in tightly fought seats**

While Indians make up only about eight percent of Malaysia's 10.9 million voters, political observers say they could affect the outcome in dozens of tightly fought parliamentary constituencies.

Malaysia's ethnic Indians are the descendents of labourers brought by the former British colonial rulers from southern India in the 19th century, mainly to work in the rubber estates.

K Arumugam from rights group Suaram said that even now, 40 percent remain labourers lacking skills, capital and education, typically earning less than RM600 a month.

In Batang Berjuntai, oil palm factory worker T Vijayan, 44, said he joined the MIC four years ago thinking it would solve his problems. But the majority of the 100 workers on his estate now want to shift to the opposition.

"We were promised clean water by the MIC if it won, but months have passed. Look, the water still stinks," he said.

Chandra said that while the Indian community is unhappy, it is difficult to predict whether it will translate into votes or seats for the opposition.

"The Indians are dependent on the state, unlike the Chinese. Even if they are unhappy it is questionable whether they will want to abdicate their own wellbeing by being not represented in the government," he said.