

Stateless Indians Gain Right To Be Buried As Malaysians!

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The plight of ignorant and uneducated Indians is legendary and deserves sympathy and compassion. From a humanitarian point of view, a caring and compassionate government would have rendered services to relieve them of their misery. But that doesn't seem to be the case in Malaysia.

For various compelling reasons these deprived poor Indians had failed to secure an identity card and were unable to register the birth of their children. Those working in rubber estates and oil palm oil plantations and those struggling to survive in slum areas never understood the requirements of the law or the implications of non-compliance of the law.

Under such circumstances, they had failed to observe the law. This unfortunate situation condemned them to a pathetic stateless misery for decades. These are the people, born and bred in Malaysia, who remain as stateless persons forced to suffer the indignities of poverty and endure the misery inflicted on them by an uncaring and unsympathetic government.

With a little show of humanity and compassion on the part of the government, they would have been rescued from their misery and could have been assisted to live the life of an ordinary citizen with hope and opportunity. Unfortunately, this did not happen.

There have been instances when they found it difficult to get jobs or a decent shelter above their heads or a place in school – all because they did not comply with the law. When these ignorant and desperate people subsequently tried to register the birth of a child or apply for an identity card, they faced lots of obstacles from an uncaring and totally unsympathetic and hostile bureaucracy. They were given the run around and made to wait endlessly without any relief.

For the vast majority of them, it was an impossible task to obtain the necessary documents that would have eased their lives. Every attempt to secure a future for them only hit a blank wall. It was such a hopeless situation that many, out of sheer frustration, gave up hope and stopped trying. What else could they do when after 20, 30 years nothing happened?

During this time, the government was always in a position to help them and ease their lives. With a little understanding of their circumstances, with the stroke of a pen, they could have been elevated from their suffering. A little merciful gesture would have rescued them from their abject poverty and made their lives meaningful. But why was nothing done all these many decades?

Is this why the Prime Minister termed the granting of citizenship and handing over of identification documents to these poor suffering Indians "historic"? He made no mention of the pathetic situation which was forced upon them by the bureaucracy and the Barisan government. He did not express any regret for not having acted very much earlier. He could have addressed their plight in 2009 when he became the Prime Minister, or the year after in 2010 or even after that in 2011. But he did nothing. Was it because these were not election years?

What could not be resolved in the last 30 years or so is now miraculously and suddenly resolved – because the election is around the corner. The Indian vote is crucial for the BN. That, some cynics claim, explains this change of heart and charity!

It was reported that 5593 Indians received their MyKad and 4023 Indians received their citizenship (New Straits Times, 15 February 2012). It was no comfort that so many Indians were suddenly legitimised. How is it that, out of the blue, so many Indians had no difficulty in obtaining these important documents in 2012? How is it, this time around, they did not encounter the obstacles that had plagued them previously? How is it that their nightmare vanished, as it were, with a snap of the fingers!

We have this 72-year-old woman, Parvathi Marimuthu, who was genuinely elated to receive her MyKad and could not contain her joy: "I am now a proud Malaysian citizen." But she had to wait 29 years to receive her MyKad!

Then there is 73-year-old L Ramasamy, "who was truly overwhelmed after overcoming countless barriers to get his blue MyKad" so suddenly. In his own words: "I have been here since the year Malaysia received independence..." And yet nobody spared a thought for him or bothered to render a little help that could have made all the difference to his life.

Spare a thought for 76-year-old Saharunisah Arshad, who over a period of 35 years had been applying unsuccessfully: "I was a single mother bringing up two children, and earning a living was indeed a challenge without proper identification." How this old lady would have struggled and suffered – simply because the government did not care.

Another happy person is 65-year-old L Nangaletmy, born and bred in Malaysia, and who finally received her citizenship after previous failed attempts. Why was her application not entertained earlier? On what grounds did she qualify now?

The Prime Minister who was present proudly stated, "They will now be able to enjoy health care services at government clinics for just RM1 and seek employment in the public sector." He also mentioned that the recipients would now be able to exercise their rights as citizens and gain access to basic government service previously denied then including education and welfare.

What is the point in giving them this privilege when they are in their late sixties and seventies, when they are too old to work, when they are unable to obtain a bank loan or travel in search of a better life? Even if welfare aid is extended to them, how long can they enjoy this when they are so advanced in age? Will this aid be granted immediately or will they have to wait indefinitely, perhaps until the 14th general elections?

They have no proper shelter above their heads since they cannot afford one and were not qualified legitimately to own one as they were stateless. Will the BN government now provide some form of shelter for them?

They have no savings and they have no benefits from EPF or Socso for as stateless persons they were not eligible to contribute to these agencies. How do they survive in this late stage of their lives?

Who will compensate them for their wasted years and lost opportunities? Aren't they entitled to some form of a relief from the BN government, which had robbed them of a livelihood?

Mr Prime Minister, what these unfortunate Indians have gained in the twilight years of their lives, after decades of deliberate denial and deprivation, is the right to be buried as Malaysians!

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