

3e: Economic Justice

Preamble

The vision to achieve a just, equitable and inclusive society is enshrined in the Rukunegara, which was conceptualised in 1970. We are far from realising this national aspiration. This policy area encapsulates the aspirations of our People to work and live with dignity in a fair and inclusive Nation. The key proposals focus on policies and the requisite institutional-legal frameworks to ensure economic rights and social justice for all our People.

I. Inclusive Society

Malaysians support policies and programmes that look out equally for all and help the needy, regardless of social status, race or religion. We also welcome policies that promote participation, capability and diversity. However, the political rhetoric over the New Economic Policy and its subsequent incarnations has downplayed these aspirations. This is an opportunity for a national policy to provide clarity on these objectives, and to align programmes in a systematic and constructive manner. A new policy framework that safeguards equality in basic rights, dignity and well-being, while promoting participation, capability and diversity is required.

(Dr. Lee Hwok Aun, Proposal 3E-1)

1. Build a cohesive society based on equality and fairness.

Reformulate the pillars of development to make it inclusive, based on:

- i. Equality—provision of basic needs and decent living standards to all, based on the principles of equality, dignity and human rights. These policies specifically involve basic education, public health services, nutrition, social protection, shelter, basic income and decent work conditions.
- ii. Fairness—develop capabilities and promote participation in order to reduce intergroup disparities in access, opportunity, capability and representation, and ultimately to narrow income and wealth gaps. The

key areas are tertiary education, professional-managerial occupations, enterprise development, wealth and property ownership.

(Dr. Lee Hwok Aun, Proposal 3E-1)

2. Establish an Equal Opportunity Employment Commission to safeguard minority groups from discrimination at the workplace.

(Anusha Arumugam, Proposal 3E-2)

Young Malaysians from minority groups have raised concerns over racial discrimination in employment, particularly with regards to opportunities for career development. Institutional and legal measures should be set in place to reduce and prevent issues of racial discrimination, based on principles of equality and justice.

3. Promulgate a Social Inclusion Act and establish an independent Social Inclusion Commission directly answerable to Parliament.

(Saya Anak Bangsa Malaysia, Proposal 3E-3)

Forty per cent of Malaysians are still trapped in the intergenerational cycle of poverty and inequality. Vulnerable individuals and groups continue to encounter prejudice, discrimination and remain marginalised. We need an independent commission to oversee poverty reduction, marginalisation and social inclusiveness. Furthermore, a Social Inclusion Act should be enacted to establish legal provisions for specific matters such as:

- i. Fulfilling the basic needs of all people fairly and equitably.
- ii. Upholding the fundamental values of self-reliance, self-esteem and the dignity of our people.
- iii. Providing our children with the capability to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and inequality.

II: Impact of COVID-19 on Vulnerable Groups

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the inherent weaknesses of Malaysia's numerous social protection programmes. The overarching system is not designed to meet the basic needs of food and shelter, nor to adequately address the socioeconomic vulnerabilities and fiscal challenges that affect a sizeable

proportion of our population and residents of this country. A comprehensive social protection system is imperative to ensure that the basic needs of all citizens, especially the vulnerable, are met.

4: Ensure social protection for low-income households headed by women.

Women and children from low-income urban households are among those who have been most adversely impacted. COVID-19 has vastly reduced women's economic opportunities, particularly those working part-time and informally with low pay and no savings. This group experienced disproportionate difficulties in accessing social safety nets, healthcare services and internet connectivity/technology. The social protection system needs to be re-evaluated to provide robust and comprehensive protection, especially for women and children from the urban poor and vulnerable communities.

- i. Design specific social protection policies to provide for low-income households headed by women.
- ii. Establish a central coordinating committee with representation from all stakeholders to address issues and coordinate social assistance programmes.

(Lim Su Lin, People's Health Forum, Proposal 3E-4)

5. Conduct a Universal Basic Income (UBI) pilot experiment to evaluate the suitability of full implementation by 2025.

(Dr. Nurul Kauthar, IKRAM Pulau Pinang, Proposal 3E-5)

The UBI is one way of addressing income security for the most vulnerable groups.

III. Affordable Public Housing for Targeted Groups in Need of Decent Shelter

The national median monthly household income of a household of four in 2019 is RM5,873, rendering affordable housing beyond the means of at least 50% of the people. It will take at least 60 times this amount to get a decent shelter. The provision of adequate housing is a fundamental right under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948.

6. Take steps towards collaborative, affordable, community-based housing.

- i. Adopt the Industrialised Building System (a Malaysian term to describe the use of automation, mechanisation and prefabrication of components for the building industry) and the 3-D printing method, and use environmentally sustainable housing materials.
- ii. Establish a national youth housing project based on the rent-to-own concept.
- iii. Enhance funding for community housing through the use of Petronas dividends, Permodalan Nasional Berhad investment contributions and government bonds.

(CS Loh & Dr. Tai Tuck Leong, Monsoon Malaysia, Proposal 3E-6)

7. Adopt an efficient public housing policy.

To contain the rising cost of urban housing that is affected by real estate speculation in a free market economy:

- i. devolve powers to state governments and local authorities to supply public housing.
- ii. transform unmarketable apartments/condominiums into public housing rentable units. Establish a universal criterion for rental eligibility by proximity to work location, irrespective of income group.
- iii. give fresh graduates a subsidy for public housing rental and accord this group higher priority when it comes to approval of such rentals.

(Wong Tsu Soon, Agora Society Malaysia, Proposal 3E-7)

8. Promulgate an Estate Workers Housing Act.

The demand for guarantee of housing for estate workers stems from a legacy of being denied basic housing ownership rights for over three decades. Once their contract period ends, estate workers are vulnerable to eviction since they do not possess legal ownership over their living quarters. The low wages mean that workers are often unable to afford a house, even houses built under the government's affordable housing schemes, as prices are constantly rising. The Housing Scheme for Estate Workers, formulated by then prime minister Tun

Abdul Razak Hussein in the 1970s, was a laudable policy on paper but its implementation and enforcement remain far from reality.

An Estate Workers Housing Act is needed to ensure that:

- i. owners/employers adopt and abide by the Housing Scheme ownership policy for current and ex-workers.
- ii. the Housing Scheme for Estate Workers is fully subsidised by the federal or state government.
- iii. current services and facilities for workers are retained in the new housing area.

(Karthigesu Manickam, MARHAEN, Proposal 3E-8)

9. Stop evicting urban pioneers.

Urban pioneer villages have been around for almost 50 years. The current residents are third- and fourth-generation descendants of villagers or estate workers who had migrated to the cities for survival, and were even welcomed by the government, as additional labour was needed for the growing cities. In the 1970s and 1980s, the government allocated land to these pioneers for farming purposes. However, the villages are located on private property and government reserve land, and the residents are now under constant threat of eviction. The contribution of urban pioneers to the development of our cities is immeasurable and needs to be duly recognised by:

- i. Recognising the existing villages as traditional villages and giving the villagers the requisite land grants.
- ii. Providing communities identified for relocation with alternative housing prior to any eviction or demolition. Alternatively, a temporary transit housing with fair rental must be provided till the alternative housing is completed.
- iii. Ensuring that the alternative housing is near the original village to reduce disruption to the urban pioneers' livelihood.
- iv. Promulgating an Anti-Eviction Act to ensure the fundamental rights of pioneers to alternative land/housing and adequate compensation.

(Parameswary Elumalai, MARHAEN, Proposal 3E-9)

10. Local councils must be responsible for the maintenance of low-cost flats.

The physical state of low-cost flats in the country is generally appalling, resulting in an uncondusive living environment for occupant families, while negatively affecting their physical and mental health. Under statutory law, the Joint Management Body (JMB) of each low-cost development is responsible for overseeing maintenance and cleanliness. However, the monthly fees imposed by JMBs are often beyond what the majority of tenants can afford, on top of having to pay assessment and land/parcel taxes.

Further, there have been many reported cases of low-cost flat residents being subjected to unjust treatment by local authorities, such as having to pay the local council double the amount charged to residents of low-cost-terraced houses for fewer services.

Henceforth, to ease the burden of low-cost flat dwellers, all local councils should assume responsibility for the maintenance services of low-cost flats, with appropriate checks and balances in place to ensure integrity in the process.

(Madhavi Sahatuan, MARHAEN, Proposal 3E-10)

IV: Equal Rights for Binational Spouses

The Long-Term Social Visit Pass (LTSVP) visa of spouses strictly prohibits any form of employment. When exceptions are given, it is still highly restrictive. Professional licences can only be obtained after Permanent Residence is granted. Employers are reluctant to hire due to these restrictions. This has caused non-citizen spouses to be economically dependent on their Malaysian spouse, who becomes the sole provider. This dependence can increase the risk of domestic violence as non-citizen spouses are left with no choice but to depend on their Malaysian spouse for their legal status and economic security in the country.

The rights of non-citizen spouses to financial autonomy and security must be upheld.

11. Give non-citizen spouses equal rights to employment and social services.

- i. Remove the prohibition from employment on their visa.
- ii. Grant them the right to work upon registration of marriage.
- iii. Allow them to open individual bank accounts.
- iv. Extend to them the protection of labour laws including mandatory Employees Provident Fund and entitlements to severance packages.

(Bina Ramanand, *Family Frontiers*, Proposal 3E-11)

Concluding Remarks

The 11 actions range from a call to adopt new conceptual lenses for national socio-economic policy formulation and implementation, to tackling the issues of poverty, inequality and social protection, and the need to protect and promote the rights of all citizens and residents in a truly just and inclusive Nation.