



SURAT KHABAR	:	SUNDAY STAR			
TARIKH	:	19/8/2018	MUKA SURAT	:	14
JABATAN	:	KATS / YBM			
KLASIFIKASI	:	PERHATIAN			

My MP

Dr Xavier Jayakumar

# He means business

From a 'shoot on sight' policy to combat poaching, to a radical overhaul of water management, the new Water, Land and Natural Resources Minister is not holding back.

Stories BY MARTIN VENGADESAN,  
RASHVINJEET S. BEDI and VINCENT TAN

SERIOUSLY committed – that's how Dr Xavier Jayakumar feels about the "shoot on sight" policy he recently proposed to solve the problem of poaching in Malaysia's jungles.

The newly appointed Water, Land and Natural Resources Minister vows to go that extra mile to protect the endangered Malayan tiger, tapir and elephants from poachers.

As he points out, there are about 250 to 350 tigers left in Malaysian forests, and now there are even poachers from Indochina illegally hunting in the forest reserves of Perak, Kelantan and Pahang.

"They put snares everywhere. We remove a portion of them but there are thousands of them laid in the forest.

"They don't only catch the tigers, they catch all the animals in the snares.

"That is a huge problem. Tigers are apex predators; if you remove the tiger, you have a problem with all the other predators.

"I strongly believe in a shoot on sight policy to address this," Dr Xavier tells *Sunday Star* in an exclusive interview recently.

It may seem drastic but it has proven successful elsewhere when all other measures against poachers fail. Besides, the poachers are often better armed than our park rangers.

But Dr Xavier says he has to convince his other colleagues in the Cabinet about the merits of this move.

He is also suggesting more deterrent laws by making amendments to the Wildlife Conservation Act.

He wants to make more meaningful laws that can "frighten" people from harming or disturbing wildlife, such as a five-year jail sentence for someone in possession of a prohibited item such as the paw of a tiger, the claw of a bear or a rare bird.

"We have to look into this in the long run," he says.

The conservation of wildlife is just one task facing Dr Xavier in this wide-ranging ministry that covers water, land and mineral resources.

"Water" covers not just the source, but all the way to the taps.

It also covers sewage systems and flood mitigation, among other things.

"Land" is all federal land, of which the ministry is the guardian, while natural resources include everything from forests to marine parks.

Anything that is mined under the ground would require a permit and Approved Permit (AP) from the ministry before it can be exported, says Dr Xavier.

One of the biggest issues facing the country is deforestation because of logging, Dr Xavier highlights.

While illegal logging is not much of a problem, he says there is rapid deforestation going on, particularly in Kelantan, Kedah and Pahang.

As it stands, the forest cover in Malaysia stands at about 52%, says Dr Xavier.

Without Sabah and Sarawak in the equation, Peninsular Malaysia does not meet the 50% requirement in accordance to the 1992 Rio Conventions.

The problems with deforestation also have a lot to do with the water that comes out of our taps, as forests are important for water catchment.

Malaysia as a tropical country shouldn't be short of raw water if there is proper management of the resource.

"It's just a matter of management. Because

*It is not necessary to see everything through a racial lens.... We have proved that you need not be a race-based party to bring about social changes for a particular community.*

of the privatisation of the water industry, the private shareholders pay more attention on earning revenue and profit rather than looking at expanding or putting in the best system so that everybody can get water throughout the year," he says.

Dr Xavier cites Selangor as an example, where he claims Air Selangor has not been spending money for capital expenditure (capex) to improve the supply or quality of water.

"That's all tied up with dollars and cents and also the political game between Barisan Nasional and the state. In these differences of political ideology, the people will suffer because there is no willingness to find an amicable solution. That is why we were stalled all the while (from ending the water crisis)," he says.

Everyone wants to get into the water business as it is a cash cow and nobody can fail in this industry, he says, but now, the Government has finally gotten everybody to come to an understanding and sign a deal to consolidate the water industry into one.

"We are using federal funds to buy assets back from the private agencies that run the water industry in all the states," he says.

He explains Pengurusan Aset Air Bhd (PAAB) will buy these assets with the states before setting up their own water companies under state GLCs.

"We will lease it back to the state, so that the state has control over water. The tariff hike and type of water, the quality of water and the industry itself can be regulated from the ministry down to the state level," he says.

Through a payment of RM2.55bil, PAAB will pay Syarikat Pengeluar Air Selangor Sdn Bhd (Splash) RM1.9bil with the remainder to be paid by Air Selangor.

Dr Xavier says that with the purchase of Splash's assets, Air Selangor can consolidate the company and improve their services.

"You can produce bankable assets to get more loans, so you get more money. So with this capex, Air Selangor can then go in and spend money on the infrastructure that needs to be upgraded because they have not been for the past 20-25 years," he notes, adding that this will also help reduce non-revenue water.

Dr Xavier predicts that the water restructuring exercise might result in an increase of water tariffs but it will guarantee an uninterrupted flow in the taps.

"Water is an essential item. We are promising you that you will have no interference in your water supply. There won't be jerks in the water flow because the reserves are low. And you don't have to worry.

"We are telling the industry fellows that we are giving them water supply all the time. They can improve and upgrade the

industry according to the needs of the people and other users because we are prepared to give them the volume of water they need," he says.

He says water tariffs have not been increased for the past 20-25 years but that they have had to pay for the cost at current rates – for everything from chemicals to salaries.

He adds they will also be upgrading the billing system and computerising their systems.

"So how can we have water tariffs that are 20 years behind and not the present value and not pay for it? There has to be a balance," he says.

But will the people be able to accept this, especially since Pakatan Harapan promised to lower the cost of living?

"There must be a compromise as we are developing into a more developed nation. Along with that development, people have to realise that the cost of items such as water and electricity will be going up. But it will be in small amounts, to keep it stable and constant," he says.

Watch the video  
thestartv.com





SURAT KHABAR	: SUNDAY STAR	MUKA SURAT	: 15
TARIKH	: 19/8/2018		
JABATAN	: KATS / YBM		
KLASIFIKASI	: PERHATIAN		



## The twist and turns of politics

ON the desk of Dr Xavier Jayakumar is a photograph of one-time foe Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Dr Xavier laughs when asked what it's like serving under Dr M.

"If not for him, we would not have won the elections. People believed in him, (Datuk Seri) Anwar Ibrahim was in prison and we were lacking in leadership that could unite the coalition. We didn't have any icon and he came along at the right time."

Dr Xavier began his career in the dental profession, working for the government service in 1980, just before Dr M began his first stint as prime minister.

"He is completely a different man now. Really into bringing reforms. I have known him so long as a figurehead of this country and I can see the changes. I think he is really interested in putting this country back on the right path."

"He wants to make sure the people are not cheated again. We have to have a leader who is firm in order to follow through the promises. He is the right person to move forward at this time."

Dr Xavier confirms that "Dr M II" is the kind of boss who listens to those under him. "He believes in listening to everyone's views before making a decision. And we will usually follow. He is strict, and he feels that as ministers, we should be very careful with how we spend the ministry's funds. We must be transparent and accurate."

Still, as a PKR man, one of the issues on the agenda is the eventual transition of federal leadership to Anwar. Dr Xavier says his party is in no rush. "It has been said again and again. We will wait for the two years. It may be earlier, time will tell."

It's been a whirlwind 100 days for the newly sworn-in minister.

"I remember on May 9, mine was one of the first results and I said to my wife, OK girl, we have to plan the move to Parliament and sit on the opposition backbenches, which is a change after being part of the Selangor government. Suddenly, I was asked to go to Sheraton, and even then I was still blur that we might have won. It was only nearly midnight that it became glaringly clear that it could be a historical win. We only declared our win in the early morning hours and I was in the palace later when Dr M was sworn in," he recalls.

"It's a great feeling. I never expected to be a minister, or ever part of the federal government. This is a privilege and honour."

Along with Human Resources Minister M. Kulasegaran, Communications and Multimedia Minister Gobind Singh Deo and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department in charge of National Unity and Social Wellbeing P. Waythamoorthy, Dr Xavier is part of the largest ethnic Indian representation in Cabinet.

"It is not necessary to see everything through a racial lens," he stresses. "In the past 10 years in Selangor, we did programmes that MIC was not able to do, and yet we were not an Indian party. We were PKR and DAP together, and we proved that you need not be a race-

based party to bring about social changes for a particular community. It cannot always be seen as an Indian issue, so let one of us handle it."

He believes they are going into a different paradigm, "where for national social issues, Pakatan will work together to look after the needs of various communities".

But people have not gotten past this way of thinking, he concedes.

"Under Barisan Nasional this (racial-based) was the way of thinking. There is time for change, Pakatan Harapan itself is a huge shift in the type of government."

"The changes will come. You have to be patient. People are so indoctrinated by race and religion."

"We all have to fly the Malaysian flag. There is a new awakening and it should come with unity. We are rejoicing with a new government, having gotten rid of the old kleptocratic regime. This is a way of moving forward."

Is there a danger that while PKR is the coalition's biggest party, it could be outmanoeuvred by the more racially-slanted Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia of Dr Mahathir?

Dr Xavier doesn't think so.

"In the last elections, we were all using the shared flag of Keadilan. That was a great move. Now we have decided to go under the Pakatan Harapan logo. This sees us working together. Also, while PKR and DAP are multi-racial, Amanah and PPBM have associate members who are non-Malays."

PKR's free-for-all internal democracy has not met with universal understanding among a Malaysian public used to dominant leaders and subservient followers. Dr Xavier sees it as a strength.

"I think we are the most democratic party of all. We let everyone speak. We don't have rules. You look at the list of people contesting the party elections now, it's so open. Even those who have just joined are allowed to run. We have one member, one vote and e-voting with tablets, I think it will be successful."

He is not worried about potential factionalism building around strong characters like Datuk Seri Azmin Ali and Rafizi Ramli, but doesn't quite agree with candidates presented as a bloc.

"All political parties have factionalism. The extent to which it goes is important. We are all members and we want to see the party grow. We have a huge opportunity, the people have given us the mandate. This is a chance to show our abilities at governance and leadership, and how our leaders speak and behave is being watched."

"I don't believe that we should have a team. People campaign on strengths and track records. By forming a team you are forming divisions in the party. What happens if some win and some don't? Now Anwar has the chance to lead us and it's long overdue. He should be a guiding light for us, working towards a vision for the party and the people."

It may seem that Dr Xavier lives and breathes politics. After all, his daughter Sangeetha is also active in PKR's Youth wing, while his wife's older brother is former Sungai Siput MP Dr Michael Jeyakumar Devaraj of Parti Sosialis Malaysia.

However, there are sides to Dr Xavier that one might not suspect.

"I miss my hobbies. I have a serious passion for working with wood. I carve and create pieces out of driftwood. I used to spend my time like that," he shares.

"I am also more of a sportsperson. In my younger days I was very active. Nowadays, I am more into rugby, and I think it can teach anyone discipline."

"It's rough and tough but has respect for rules. I am a great lover of the All-Blacks (New Zealand's rugby union team)."



**Clocking in:** Dr Xavier never expected to become a minister but he is embracing his duties at the Water, Land and Natural Resources Ministry with dedication.