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Indian community here needs urgent attention

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I REFER to the Question and Answer Session with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad (NST, Dec 29) and, in particular, to one question.

This is: "Will the BN's defeat in Lunas change the chemistry of powersharing within the BN especially with the MIC?"

The Prime Minister's answer to this is indeed pleasing and has given renewed hope to Indians.

His answer: "No, we still stick by our agreement that we have to give MIC some seats where the number of Indian voters is small. There are no constituencies where the Indian voters are the majority, but the Chinese and Malay voters must help MIC because in other places, MIC can beat the numbers just to tilt the result in favour of Barisan Nasional in places where we expect the majority to be very small."

Dr Mahathir's optimistic vision on this is highly appreciated, but with the current political scenario, and if it still continues until the next general election, there is little hope for any candidate from the minority community to win any Parliament or State seat, whether they are from the Opposition or the ruling party.

The Indian community since independence has shown undivided loyalty to the Government. It has supported the Alliance Party and now the BN with sincerity. Its support has remained constant, stable and has never fluctuated.

However, the question here is, has the Indian community benefited from the Government's policies and plans? By now 10 per cent of the nation's economy should have been in the hands of the Indian community, but according to statistics, the community holds less than one per cent.

Who is holding the balance nine per cent? What efforts have been taken to date to rectify this situation by the community leaders and the government?

The Indian community lags behind in all aspects. For instance there is:

- * Very low intake of Indian students into the universities. Even those offered admission get in only for less important courses.
- * Difficulty in obtaining government scholarships to further higher education.
- * No opportunities for the community to obtain employment in the public sector. Indians employed in the government do not see future prospects for promotion. The private sector also shows prejudice towards hiring Indians for important jobs.
- * Difficulty in obtaining trading licenses to carry on business.
- * Less chance of obtaining financial assistance from financial institutions and from funds managed by the Government.
- * Limited shares for the Indian community in the stock market, especially on privatised government agencies.
- * Insufficient airtime for Tamil programmes on television.

The Government should take a serious view of the plight of the community. Its leaders should meet to formulate a strategic action plan for improvement and submit it to the Government and ensure the Government accepts it for implementation.

It is sad to note that leaders of Indian-based political parties, both outside and within the BN, and those leaders from parties which have a big membership of Indians, have time only to safeguard their positions and privileges.

It is a Neeya Naana (You or Me) attitude. While Dr Mahathir is calling for Malay unity, how about unity among our Indian community leaders.

Coming back to the question of Indian candidates for the next general election, I would propose that:

* At least 10 seats be reserved for the community in the Parliament and at least a minimum of five seats in a State where the Indian population is large.

The nominees for these seats shall be from political parties, NGOs, and individuals who are capable of representing the community. If I am not wrong such a practice is adopted in some countries.

The Government should review its policies to safeguard the rights of the minorities.