

PKR veep stumps for stateless Indian M'sians
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By Terence Netto

PKR vice-president N Surendran and MIC Youth have lately been locked in a war of words over the number of stateless Indian Malaysians, the lawyer insisting the actual figures are much higher than what his opponents claim.

However, both disputants don't infer from sketchy evidence they have collated on the ground that the figures are as high as what the Hindu Rights Action Front (Hindraf) had put them - nearly half-a-million.

Surendran's conjecture is that the figures are between 200,000 and 300,000, while MIC Youth, who last year launched a MyDaftar campaign to obtain identity cards for these stateless Indians, do not think that the numbers are in excess of five-figure totals.

Yesterday, in Kampong Perak in Padang Serai, Kedah, Surendran led a team of PKR workers to register the stateless and although he found only six people without identity cards, he said the number sustained his view that the overall total was closer to his projections than MIC's.

"This is only one village on the whole Peninsula where these stateless people are struggling to eke out a living," said Surendran, who is likely to be fielded in a parliamentary seat by his party at the upcoming general election.

"I suspect there are hundreds of places in the country where these people without personal identity documents are a living a life on the margins of society," he said.

"All of them have been born in Malaysia, some from even as long ago as the time of the Japanese Occupation and others just after the Second World War," he inferred.

Almost all qualify to be citizens

He claimed that by operation of the Article 14 of the constitution, he said almost all of them qualify to be citizens of Malaysia.

"That they are still with red MyKads is a travesty of their rights," said the politician who regularly handles human rights issues for his party.

Surendran said party workers are in the process of registering as many stateless people as they can find in their campaign forays throughout Peninsular Malaysia in preparation for the general election.

"It's a massive task but what we can collate we will submit for processing by the registration authorities so that these long suffering captives of statelessness can reclaim their dignity as citizens," he said.

“Just today we found one stateless who is sixty-seven years old and has a red MyKad (*photo right*). Now that should some idea of what the extent of the problem is,” he asserted.

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