

Niat lists GE demands - seeks Indian M'sian DPM

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The National Indian Rights Action Team (Niat) has listed out its demands for the next general election today, including calls for an Indian Malaysian deputy prime minister.

This was among the NGO's five demands that it wants the next government to implement within the first 100 days in office.

The proposal calls for a Malay Malaysian prime minister and deputy prime minister, plus two additional deputy prime minister posts.

The first post would be held by a Chinese Malaysian and a Sabahan, each serving for half a term. An Indian Malaysian or Sarawakian, also swapping places mid-term, would hold the other office.

"We do not want other people to sideline us. We must make sure that what comes under the 'Indian' category should be brought together.

"Otherwise you do not have any justification to ask people to do things that you won't do yourself," said Niat secretary Arun Dorasamy, who was also the project director to put together the group's 42-page booklet to explain the demands.

The booklet also explained that the marginalisation of Indian Malaysians was due to under-representation in government - a fact also acknowledged by former prime ministers Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Arun: Indian DPM, why not?

The booklet, titled "Malaysian Indians' Calls for GE13: Undo the History - Redo the Plan", was unveiled in Kuala Lumpur today at a function attended by some 80 representatives from Indian NGOs and several politicians, including Subang MP Sivarasa Rasiah and Gerakan Wanita chief Jayanthi Devi Balaguru.

It also calls for three Indian Malaysian cabinet ministers and four deputy ministers, most of whom would be elected representatives, while the rest are picked from NGOs and appointed to the cabinet.

There should be at least one Indian Muslim Malaysian and one Punjabi Malaysian amongst the deputy ministers, read the booklet.

Pre-empting criticism that the plan demand is "too idealistic", Arun said, "I think it's about to ask what is wrong with it. I think it is nothing criminal, it is totally legal. I am waiting to hear the excuses why not."

In addition, the proposed line-up calls for Indian Malaysian deputy chief ministers in Selangor, Perak, Penang and Negri Sembilan, assuming that the states are ruled by the same parties as the federal government.

Arun explained that this was because the four states collective houses 73 percent of the nation's Indian Malaysian population.

Curb alcoholism

Another of Niat's five main demands is to form a Minority Affairs and Development Department, which is to be placed under the Prime Minister's Department.

"We ought to opt for a permanent institutionalised solution rather than throwing quick fixes for issues that need greater understanding and complex manoeuvring pertaining to the minorities, especially the Malaysian Indian," the booklet read.

Its other demands include opening boarding schools to all students and not just those from national schools, tackle alcoholism with measures such as rehabilitation centres and banning the sale of alcoholic drinks in convenience shops and to end to statelessness by 2013.

Complementing the five main demands are 44 additional 'supplementary requests', which is to be implemented by the next government throughout its five-year mandate.

These tackle a wide variety of issues, ranging from economic and education policies, to the placement of police officers in schools where gangsterism had been rife.

Ambiga: End race politics

Niat chairperson Thasleem Mohamed Ibrahim said the booklet has already been sent to political parties with Indian representation two weeks ago, and a revised version was sent a week after.

These include the People's Progressive Party (PPP), MIC, DAP, and Gerakan.

Commenting on Niat's proposals, Bersih co-chairperson Ambiga Sreenevasan said that she agreed with most but not all of the proposals and praised it for trying to propose solutions rather than being merely a list of problems.

"It is absolutely proper and timely that we ask the next government, or whoever seeks office in the next government, that they will give us (at least) Item #1 in this booklet. Nothing less," she told the audience, referring to Niat's proposal for the Minority Affairs and Development Department.

She also said that while she believes racial politics should end and all races should be given assistance equally, it is 'absolutely appropriate' for her to promote the booklet although it specifically deals with Indian Malaysian issues.

The former Bar Council president explained that this was because the community had been marginalised for a long time, thus measures should be taken to rectify it.

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