

Hindraf: Racism, custodial deaths for 'future deal'

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The key issues relating to human rights in the Hindu Rights Action Force's (Hindraf) five-year blueprint for Indian welfare that are missing in the 'new deal' signed with BN are being put off for future discussions.

"We will continue to ask for those things in future deals," the group's national adviser N Ganesan (left) told Malaysiakini yesterday.

He had earlier mentioned that Hindraf had to concede issues relating to racism and deaths in custody during negotiations with the ruling coalition to get the concessions and promises of better economic opportunities for Indians.

The Hindraf-BN memorandum of understanding (MOU) for Indian Malaysians promises more special appointments for Indian leaders, a new division under the Prime Minister's Office, as well as increased funding for Indian welfare.

"All the plans stated above are drawn up based on Hindraf's five-year blueprint and the Barisan Nasional's election manifesto. A special division, functioning under the direct supervision of the prime minister, empowered and with funds, will implement the plans," concluded a Hindraf advertisement explaining the deal.

The advertisement appeared in last Sunday's edition of Tamil Nesan. An English language translation of the full-page paid ad was published by Malaysiakini yesterday.

Ganesan said that they posted the ads to answer queries on the contents of the MOU the rights movement signed with caretaker Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak last Thursday.

The public, especially Indian Malaysians, were clamouring for a peek at the document, though Ganesan said that Hindraf felt it only needed to run ads in Tamil-language newspapers to reach its target group.

"That is the segment we are focusing on, I don't think we have to do anything further," he said.

According to the ad, Hindraf had negotiated at least three more special committees for Indians affairs under the ambit of the PMO.

A committee of experts for Indian-centric plans, where the government will accept in total the plans, policies and financial allocations drawn up.

A council composed of religious scholars for issues related to temples and the Hindu religion.

An 'Indian affairs department' under the PMO to be headed by an Indian representative.

Currently BN already has a special department for Indian affairs under the PMO, headed by incumbent Minister in the Prime Minister's Department G Palanivel from MIC.

It is not clear if the new division will be in addition to Palanivel's unit, or Hindraf's appointee is meant to displace the MIC representatives in the PMO when it comes to Indian affairs.

Seeking 7.5pct of the economic pie

Other than appointments and special departments, the NGO is also demanding that the Indian Malaysians, who make up roughly 7.5 percent of population, be given the same percentage or more of the economic pie, as well as other opportunities.

The MOU mainly focused on remedies in four main areas, which are; providing relief for displaced estate workers, as well as more economic opportunities, educational opportunities and help for stateless person or Malaysian-born Indians without identification papers.

Hindraf had announced that with the signing of the MOU, they are throwing their weight as well as their support behind PM Najib and the BN coalition, citing they had already given Pakatan Rakyat the same chance to sign a binding accord with them, but claimed that they were ignored by the opposition pact.

Before this, the Indian rights pressure group had gone to town with their five-year blueprint for Indian welfare, promising an electoral pact with any side that endorses their blueprint in total and sign an agreement with them "in a binding way".

Pakatan had expressed support for several of the points mentioned in Hindraf blueprint adding many of the same concerns were already addressed by their manifesto, but refused to adopt the document in toto, causing Hindraf to renounce all support for the opposition pact, electing to accept Najib's partial adoption of the

blueprint in the 'new deal' MOU instead.

When asked about BN-friendly candidates, Perkasa's Ibrahim Ali and Zulkifli Noordin - both of whom have disparaged non-Muslims - Ganesan declined to comment.

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