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# Set up non-Muslim affairs dept: Groups

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** A coalition of 40 organisations, representing the Indian community's concerns, plans to ask Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to set up a non-Muslim affairs department under the Prime Minister's Department to provide a channel for such concerns to be brought up.

According to the coalition's acting secretary, A. Rajaretnam, there is now an Islamic Development Department under the Prime Minister's Department.

"After 50 years of independence and Malaysia being a multi-racial country, it is timely for the (prime minister) to look into setting up a non-Muslim affairs department," he said.

He suggested that the department comprise officers from various communities and backgrounds to serve as a "proper channel" created for non-Muslims to raise their concerns.

"We are also suggesting that a similar unit be created at the state

level," he told reporters after the coalition's first meeting at the Sri Subramania Swamy temple in Batu Caves yesterday.

Rajaretnam, president of the Malaysian Indian Youth Council, said the coalition will also send a memorandum on a proposed affirmative plan for the Indian community to the prime minister through MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu.

He said a special committee, led by Associate Prof. N. S. Rajendran, president of the Malaysia Hindu Dharma Mamandram, has been tasked to come up with the memorandum.

The decision to form the coalition came about after a few of its members attended a meeting with Abdullah on Friday.

He said three of 13 leaders who attended the meeting were part of the coalition. They are from three non-governmental organisations (NGOs) - the Malaysian Indian Youth Council, Malaysia Hindu Council, and Malaysia Hindu Dharma Mamandram.

According to news reports, the

meeting with Abdullah discussed the socio-economic concerns faced by the Indian community and other issues.

It was reported that Abdullah had assured the NGOs that he would listen to their views and that it would not be the last meeting.

The other coalition members at yesterday's meeting included the Malaysian Indian Development Association and Silamban Association of Malaysia.

Rajaretnam said the coalition would also like to ask Abdullah to consider charging the five leaders of the Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) detained under the Internal Security Act, in court, and for the charges to be reduced for the 31 charged with attempted murder at an illegal gathering linked to Hindraf in Batu Caves on Nov 25.

The meeting also discussed the need to convert partially-aided Tamil schools to fully-aided schools, and for the prime minister to meet with Indian NGOs once every six months.