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'Najib a close friend of Indians'

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KUALA LUMPUR: In the face of relentless attacks on Datuk Seri Najib Razak, MIC yesterday defended the prime minister whom, they said, has introduced more initiatives to help the Indian community compared with previous leaders.

MIC president Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam said since the Barisan Nasional chairman became prime minister in 2009, the latter had been a close friend to the Indian community and had become a respected leader among them.

"In the last seven years, he has done much for the Indian community compared with previous prime ministers.

"Even the leader who had helmed the top post for the longest period could not match him," Dr Subramaniam said in his policy speech at the 70th MIC annual general meeting yesterday.

He took the opportunity to thank Najib for the aid given to the community, including for Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil.

"Most of the aid is by the prime minister's own initiative as he wants to see the progress of the Indian community, including allocating special funds for SJKT and providing micro-credit facilities and assistance to improve the skills of the community," he said to thunderous applause from the delegates.

Dr Subramaniam also hoped that the government could set a 10 per cent quota in the public sector for the Indian community in the next five years.

He proposed that the government allocate a RM500 million micro-credit revolving fund to help Indian entrepreneurs, while a certain percentage should be fixed for their participation in mega projects.

He said the government should include the financial aid to SJKT as a permanent allocation under the Education Ministry's budget.

He listed seven issues affecting low-income group that need to be tackled, namely education, job opportunities, housing, micro businesses, the improvement of skills training, health and socio-psychology aid.

Later, in a press conference, Dr Subramaniam said the party planned to contest nine parliamentary and 19 state seats in the 14th General Election.

In the last general election, MIC won four out of nine parliamentary and five out of 18 state seats it contested.

Under the party's action plan, Dr Subramaniam said, MIC would set up 500 new branches that would be led by graduates