

PM hopes for progressive Indian community

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KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said on Thursday he hoped to see a vast improvement in the status and welfare of the Indian community in the country over the next five years.

The prime minister said he also wanted to see the Indian community fully integrated into the mainstream of national economic development.

"I hope that within (the next) five years, we will see the improvement of the Indian community," he said during an hour-long interview with deejays Aanantha and Uthaya on the "Kalakkal Kaalai" breakfast show over THR Raaga radio.

"As you know, our target is to double our income level by 2020, basically to about US\$15,000 per capita," Najib told the listeners.

"We target better and better, and we will deliver what we promise," he said.

Responding to a question from a listener, Najib said the government had achieved much for the Indian community over the last two years and there was greater recognition and awareness of problems faced by Indians.

He said new approaches were taken in recognising and tackling these problems, even from the time when he was the deputy prime minister and chaired the Cabinet Committee on Indian Affairs.

"Some of the things done include the allocation for Tamil schools, where it is the largest ever in our history. The latest decision, for example, is (providing) 1,000 additional places in our matriculation colleges, starting from this year. Previously, it was just 500," he said.

Najib said this was very significant because the percentage of Indians entering universities was rather low, and he hoped that it would go up to a more acceptable level.

"I also announced that 100 top Indian students will be given scholarships to continue their studies at Masters and PhD levels," he said.

Asked by a deejay of the popular Tamil radio station what Tamil words he knew, Najib said he had very basic knowledge like everybody else in that language but he progressed on his own when he introduced 1Malaysia.

"I had to know what 1Malaysia is in Tamil. So, I learned "Ore Malaysia" (means 1Malaysia). When I started engaging more with the Tamil community, and the engagement became very frequent, I picked up other words such as "Nambikai", which means trust.

"You know, you must have the trust of the community, so that we can move forward together. When I went to the Sri Murugan Centre (SMC), I heard a part of their slogan "Acchamillai" which means, no fear, we must overcome any obstacle to success.

"When I launched the Barisan Nasional convention, I used the Tamil expression, which is a proverb that means to give them a sense that this is a winning team. If this team can't win, other teams cannot win. And I love to learn more," he said.

Answering a question from a caller on the main challenges that he faced daily as the prime minister, he said there were many challenges but time management was critical since there were many demands that needed to be fulfilled.

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