

Respect principles of Merdeka': Subramaniam
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KUALA LUMPUR (Jan 21, 2013): The MIC has responded to former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's suggestion for a Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCI) on pre-Independence immigrants in Malaysia, by asserting that the historic decision based on "principles of Independence" must be respected.

Its deputy president Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam said solving the current problem of stateless Indians in Malaysia is a more pressing concern for the MIC than dredging up ghosts of the past, on a matter which has been accepted as a historical fact.

He was commenting on the proposal by Mahathir for a RCI to investigate the awarding of citizenship to one million immigrants in the then Federation of Malaya.

"During the discussions for Independence, one of the issues the British at that time had to handle was the status of non-Malays who they had brought in to work in the country," he said.

"We have to recognise that the government has the prerogative to give citizenship and it is a continuous process. So long as it is given rightfully and fairly, I think that is fine," he said, adding that the decision made by first prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman as the country's founding father should not be questioned.

Subramaniam, who is human resources minister, also said that MIC has managed to resolve most reported cases of stateless Indians, some born before Independence and others after 1957, but all of whom have only lived in Malaysia and no place else to go.

Constitutional expert Prof Abdul Aziz Bari had on Sunday called on MIC and MCA to state their views over Mahathir's proposal, pointing out that it is tantamount to alleging that Chinese and Indians had at the time gained their citizenship through illegal means.

Mahathir has come under fire after he admitted last week that foreign immigrants in Sabah were granted citizenship during his tenure as prime minister.

He also claimed that Tunku Abdul Rahman had done worse by granting citizenship to one million "unqualified people" in peninsular Malaysia.

The matter came to light following testimonies by witnesses at an ongoing RCI proceedings on the problem of illegal immigrants in Sabah.

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