

## **PM's Shot-In-The-Arm Initiatives for Socio-Economic Development of Indians**

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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 21 (Bernama) -- Indian-based political parties and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Malaysia may have their differences of opinion on a host of issues but they agree on one thing - that it is under the leadership of Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak that the Indian community has seen more concrete efforts by the government to improve their socio-economic well-being.

They acknowledge the prime minister's approaches towards addressing the grievances of the community and his direct supervision of the initiatives taken to improve the state of Tamil schools, empower Indian entrepreneurs and allocate funds to NGOs that are involved in projects aimed at raising the socio-economic status of Indians.

Najib, who became Malaysia's sixth prime minister in 2009, is set to mark his 40th year in politics on Feb 21. He was 22 when he was thrust into politics after his father, Tun Abdul Razak, died of leukaemia on Jan 14, 1976.

### **EXTRAORDINARY**

In fact, Najib was instrumental for the establishment of the Cabinet Committee on Indian Affairs in 2008 when he was Deputy Prime Minister. The formation of this high-level committee, which Najib chaired, came about following the drop in support from the Indian community for Barisan Nasional (BN) during the 2008 General Election, when almost 85 per cent of the Indian vote reportedly went to the opposition pact.

At the 25th Ipoh Barat MIC annual dinner in Ipoh last April, party President Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam paid tribute to Najib, even describing him as an "extraordinary prime minister who has done a lot for the Indian community".

"Through his efforts, there have been lots of changes to the community. We will support his leadership, so the agenda to help the community can continue in a positive and total way," Subramaniam had said.

In 2010, Najib initiated the formation of the Special Implementation Task Force for the Indian Community (SITF), chaired by Subramaniam, specifically to resolve the many long-standing woes faced by the community.

Among the first things SITF chose to tackle was the lack of proper identity documents as there were claims that some 300,000 Indians in Malaysia did not possess MyKad, citizenship or even birth certificates.

In February 2011, the SITF, in collaboration with the Home Affairs Ministry and the National

Registration Department (NRD), kicked off the MyDaftar programme and so far it has helped 15,000 undocumented Indians to obtain proper identity documents.

## UNDOCUMENTED INDIANS

SITF Chief Coordinator Datuk N. Siva Subramaniam said Najib had literally given the previously "stateless" people a new lease of life as they were able to enrol themselves in schools and get proper jobs, armed with the proper documents.

"They have become equal partners with the others in society... you can see the joy in the faces of these children, their parents and the elderly upon getting their birth certificates and citizenship.

"The children are able to go to school and get quality education. By getting citizenship status, all of them can enjoy the benefits offered by the government," he told Bernama, recently.

Siva Subramaniam, who was former National Union of Teaching Profession president and has served the government under the leadership of three prime ministers, said it was only during the current administration has he seen a substantial improvement in the quality of life of Malaysian Indians.

He said a major problem faced by the Indians, especially those who did not possess official documents and were not educated, was their inability to communicate with the counter staff at the NRD offices.

According to Subramaniam, their problems were brought to Najib's attention and following his intervention, 65 Indian officers were appointed three years ago to assist Indians seeking the NRD's services.

"Having been in government service for 33 years, I've never seen more efforts being made to enable the marginalised Indians to fit into the mainstream of society. We may not have attained 100 per cent success but at least, things have started to move now. I have great respect for Najib," he said.

## RIGHT DECISION

Najib was also responsible for the establishment of the Secretariat for the Empowerment of Indian Entrepreneurs, Indian Entrepreneur Development Scheme and Unit for Socio-Economic Development of Indian Community (SEDIC) to provide much-needed assistance to small- and medium-sized businesses and help boost the community's socio-economic status.

As for education, Najib was instrumental for the setting up of the Tamil School Development Unit and Action Plan for the Future of Tamil Schools. All these special units and secretariats come under the purview of the Prime Minister's Department.

Meanwhile, in November last year, the prime minister approved a federal allocation of RM100 million for 380 NGOs, to be channelled to them through SEDIC. The funds will be used to improve the lives of 40 per cent of the 2.6 million ethnic Indians in the country who are said to be living below the poverty line.

It was reported earlier this month that since Najib became prime minister, the government has to date approved RM760 million for the development of Tamil schools, which has benefitted some 524 schools nationwide.

Tamil Foundation Malaysia president Raghavan Annamalai said the prime minister had made the right decision by channelling the RM100 million fund through the various NGOs.

"The NGOs are more effective when it comes to implementing projects for the socio-economic upliftment of Indians," he said.

Raghavan said his foundation has been utilising government funds to carry out a programme called Parents Assuring Students' Success or IMPAK, as it is popularly called, to train parents to help their children to perform better in school and to enable them to get a head start in life.

He said so far 10,000 parents have undergone the programme, which is conducted over 10 weeks and is aimed at building a bridge of relationship between the home and school, and the parents and their children.

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