

'Respect principles of Merdeka'

> MIC says it is more concerned about resolving problem of stateless Indians

BY ALYAA ALHADJRI
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

KUALA LUMPUR: 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.

BRIEFS

ASSISTING THOSE IN NEED OF CITIZENSHIP

GEORGE TOWN: Penang has formed a centre to assist individuals living in the state who are without Malaysian citizenship. Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng said the Stateless People in Penang Programme will collect data and statistics on those without birth certificates or identity cards, as well as those with only permanent resident status. It will assist in the procedure of obtaining proper identification documents from the National Registration Department. "This is a commitment by the state government to help those living without Malaysian citizenship even though they are born in Malaysia or have been living here for years," he said yesterday.

ROS TO MEET DAP MEMBERS UNHAPPY OVER POLLS

PUTRAJAYA: The Registrar of Societies (ROS) will be calling for a meeting with unhappy DAP members who have claimed there was manipulation in the party's recent polls, Home Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein said yesterday. He said the matter is not an investigation but the ROS is merely looking into the case based on information to be given by the members. It was reported that two DAP life members urged the ROS to investigate, claiming manipulation in the party's central executive committee (CEC) election last month. Earlier this month, DAP admitted error in its counting of votes at the election and announced the rectified list of winners.



BERNAMAPIX

OFF TO CAIRO

... Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak confers with Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein before boarding his plane for Cairo at the KL International Airport yesterday. AFP reported that Najib will visit Gaza in what would be a rare visit by a foreign leader to the impoverished Palestinian territory.

Call to probe Thai army hand in trafficking Rohingyas

BANGKOK: A leading human rights group yesterday called on the Thai government to investigate allegations that the military has been involved in trafficking migrants to Malaysia.

Police sources have accused army personnel of benefiting from trafficking members of the Rohingya ethnic group from Myanmar or Bangladesh via southern Thailand to Malaysia, according to weekend reports by the *Bangkok Post* and *Phuket One* online news.

More than 1,000 Rohingyas, a Muslim minority from Rakhine state in western Myanmar, have arrived in southern Thailand by boat this month, and more are expected in the coming weeks.

Most of them claim to be seeking

employment in neighbouring Malaysia.

"The military often helps them into the arms of people traffickers based on Thailand's Andaman coast who charge 50,000 baht (RM5,000) to 60,000 baht (RM6,000) to smuggle Rohingya across the border into Malaysia," *Phuket One* reported. The *Bangkok Post* quoted a police source as saying, "sometimes they even used military trucks to transport these Rohingya migrants".

Human Rights Watch called on the Thai government to investigate the accusations. Thai government officials did not respond immediately to a request for comment.

"The government seems to be taking these reports seriously, but the question is, will they dare take action against the offenders," said Sunai Phasuk, Thailand representative for

Human Rights Watch.

He said the government does not appear to completely control the military with regard to the Rohingya migrants.

On Jan 4, the military deported 73 Rohingyas a day after Bangkok said they would be held and assessed for refugee status.

"Bangkok gave us guarantees that these migrants would not be shipped out but they were shipped out anyway on a civilian boat and handed over to another boat of Rohingyas who were heading to Malaysia," Sunai said.

"It shows that Bangkok cannot control the military," he said. The Rohingyas, who are not recognised as citizens by Myanmar, were the target of communal violence in Rakhine state from June that left more than 100 dead and up to 60,000 displaced. - dpa

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DAP to field new women candidates in PJ?

PRESS DIGEST

BY KONG SEE HOH
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

DAP LOOKS set to field young women to defend two state seats in Petaling Jaya in the 13th general election (GE13).

According to a report in *Sin Chew Daily* yesterday, Yeo Bee Yin, special assistant to Petaling Jaya Utara MP Tony Pua, is expected to contest Damansara Utama, replacing incumbent Dr Cheah Wing Yin who was disabled following an accident in 2010.

Another DAP newbie, strongman Lim Kit Siang's political secretary Kasthuri Patto, is tipped to contest Bukit Gasing, which has been left vacant following the death of the party's assemblyman Edward Lee in

December 2011.

Thirty-two-year-old Kasthuri, the daughter of late DAP stalwart P. Pato, has been active in the Bukit Gasing state constituency for some time.

Both Yeo and Kasthuri joined a host of Pakatan Rakyat (PR) heavyweights to speak at the "Final Countdown to Putrajaya" fundraising dinner organised by PJU DAP at the MBPJ hockey stadium in Petaling Jaya on Saturday. The master of ceremony at the function hinted that DAP would field fresh faces in the Petaling Jaya area.

A DAP source told *Sin Chew* the party intends to field Yeo in Damansara Utama.

A master's degree holder in Advanced Chemical Engineering from Cambridge University, 30-year-old Yeo joined DAP in February last year. Party secretary-general

Lim Guan Eng made a high-profile announcement in August last year of Yeo and political analyst Ong Kian Ming joining the party.

Yeo, who is now social media strategy adviser for the party, has since been active in Damansara Utama. Contacted by *Sin Chew*, Yeo said she does not know if she would be given a ticket to contest and would leave everything to the party leadership.

On talk that she has been tipped to replace Cheah in Damansara Utama, Yeo said it was mere speculation, adding that she joined DAP not with the intention to stand for elections.

Asked if she is ready to contest, she said one has to be prepared for anything and added that apart from being active in party matters and making some speeches, she is no different from other members.