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HEADLINE: Indian Progressive Front quits Gagasan

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The All-Malaysian Indian Progressive Front (IPF) announced today its official withdrawal from the Gagasan Rakyat coalition and its support for the Barisan Nasional (BN).

Its president M.G. Pandithan said his party had withdrawn from the opposition coalition "because we do not want to waste our time like in the last general election by supporting a coalition which would not represent the needs of the lower-income Indians.

"We feel the people and party might be better represented by the Barisan Nasional, he told a Press conference at the Grand Pacific Hotel.

He added that the party had submitted its application to the Barisan Nasional last November and was still awaiting a reply.

The Press conference was also attended by the party's supreme council members, youth and women leaders who were earlier briefed by Pandithan.

The Gagasan Rakyat is a coalition of six opposition parties - Parti Melayu Semangat 46, Democratic Action Party, Parti Rakyat Malaysia, Parti Bersatu Sabah, Kongress India Muslim Malaysia (Kimma) and Malaysian Solidarity Party.

Pandithan also voiced his support for the leadership of the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

"I will try to meet Dr Mahathir soon to reaffirm our interest in joining the Barisan Nasional," he said.

Pandithan added that the party was trying to arrange a gathering at Stadium Negara on March 19 to voice its support for the leadership of Dr Mahathir and the Barisan Nasional component parties.

"We expect to amass 50,000 party members from all over the country to pledge our allegiance to the Prime Minister," he said.

He also vowed his support for MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu and proclaimed that whoever is Samy's enemy is also an enemy of the IPF.

Asked to comment on Samy Vellu's statement recently that there is only one Indian party which is the MIC, Pandithan said there should be room for one more in the BN.

He added that the IPF, unlike the MIC, represented the interests of the lower-income Indians who are mostly estate workers.

On another question as to whether he had consulted Democratic Malaysian Indian Party Congress (DMIP) president V. Govindaraj about his party's intentions, Pandithan replied he will seek a meeting soon with Govindaraj to discuss this matter.

Govindaraj was a former MIC vice-president who was sacked in 1984 and since then formed the DMIP. He had earlier contemplated asking DMIP, IPF, Kimma and Malaysian Solidarity Party to form a coalition party for Indians before entering the BN.

Pandithan, like Govindaraj, was an MIC vice-president who was sacked in 1989. A former Parliamentary Secretary and MP of Tapah, he formed the IPF in 1990.

More than 300 party supporters attended today's meeting.

GRAPHIC: Picture - A change ... Pandithan briefing IPF members on the withdrawal. On his left is party secretary-general M.R. Murugaraw and on his right treasurer K. Panjamurthi.

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