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Abu Hassan: IPF will join BN on the campaign trail

PETALING JAYA, Sat. - Indian Progressive Front members will join Selangor Barisan Nasional's election campaign although it is not a component party, Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Abu Hassan Omar said today.

"We acknowledge that IPF has strong grassroots support and it has been supporting the BN for a long time, especially in the 1995 general election and the Permatang State by-election in 1997," he said.

Abu Hassan, who is the State Barisan Nasional chairman, said there were 1.2 million voters in Selangor, of which almost 500,000 were members of Barisan Nasional component parties.

He was speaking at a gathering of IPF members to pledge their support to ensure an overwhelming BN victory.

"I believe the BN component party leaders in Selangor will be able to make full use of help from parties like IPF."

Asked about IPF's application to join BN, Abu Hassan said IPF should be patient. IPF president M.G. Pandithan, who was present, said IPF was not a component party but "we are already in".

Earlier, Abu Hassan received a rousing welcome from IPF members and all the 14 branch leaders from Selangor garlanded him.

The 4,000-odd members also took an oath pledging their undivided support for BN. Pandithan said similar gatherings would be held in all states.

He added, of late, some BN component party leaders had indicated that they did not need IPF's support, referring to MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu's recent comments.

"Nevertheless, we will still support all BN candidates, including those from MIC. We see all BN candidates as the candidate of our leader, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"But we will not ask for anything from the Prime Minister or Barisan Nasional. But if we get anything, it is a bonus.

"We have shown our undivided support and struggled for the last 10 years and we are willing to do so for another 100 years," he said.

However, Pandithan ruled out merging IPF and MIC.

"We (IPF) want to be a separate entity. When MIC was formed some 50 years ago, there were only some 600,000 Indians in the country. Now there are about 2.1 million Indians and there is room for another Indian-based party.

"There must also be a check and balance for MIC. Actually there is no problem among the grassroots supporters of both the parties.

"The problem is only with Samy Vellu. He feels threatened if there is to be an alternative party fighting for the cause of Indians," he told reporters.

Earlier, IPF Selangor election machinery chairman Kadir Mydin said they had 300 men and 200 women already on the campaign trail.

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