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Indians' share of national wealth `amounts to RM16b'

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Challenging critics who claimed Indians were poor, MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu said the community's share of national wealth was a respectable RM16 billion.

Saying the critics had a blinkered view, the Works Minister added that this was because they measured the state of Indian well-being using estate workers as a yardstick.

In an interview with the New Sunday Times (see P29), he said although Indians held only 1.5 per cent of equity worth RM9 billion they also had businesses worth RM7 billion.

"The critics refuse to see how Indians have improved. They have a blinkered view, refusing to look left or right but only at the estate worker."

He said Indians made up only about 30 per cent of estate workers and their standard of living could not be used as yardstick for the whole community.

He said there were 50,000 businesses registered under Indians of which 20,000 were small businesses like van and small lorry operators, restaurateurs and those in the metal business.

Asked about Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's decision to allow former Chinese members of Angkatan Keadilan Rakyat (Akar) which had been dissolved to join Umno, he said the MIC was prepared to join an expanded Umno in future, which could represent all races.

Umno could be called the United Malaysian National Organisation to represent the interests of all Malaysians, he said.

"I anticipate this happening one day. The Prime Minister's move at the moment points towards that sort of attitude."

On whether the MIC would work closer with parties within the Barisan Nasional like the People's Progressive Party and Gerakan to ensure Indians had a solid platform for representation, he said this was being done on the premise that the MIC was the sole voice of the Indians in the Government.

"There must be somebody to present the aspirations of the Indian community. A multi-racial party cannot do that. If they talk only about the needs of Indians, the other communities they represent would be upset."

On the economic position of Indians, he said the popular perception that they were poor was wrong. This was because critics based their views on the condition of estate workers who were generally poor but only represented about 30 per cent of the community.

On why it was difficult for him to accept the Indian Progressive Front president Datuk M.G. Pandithan back into the party, he said: "I gave him my hand but he spat at it after which we felt there was no point talking to him anymore."