

29/09/2002

Kimma: We have proven ourselves to BN

Patrick Sennyah; Chow Kum Hor

WITH a membership of about 80,000, the Malaysian Indian Muslim Congress (Kimma) feels it is time Barisan Nasional component parties stopped considering them as outsiders and allowed them into the ruling coalition.

They feel they have become a force to be reckoned with since its inception in 1976 and now command at least 40,000 registered voters.

Its leaders, claiming to represent the 500,000-odd Indian Muslims in the country, feel the community can make a difference in the country's political equation, especially in constituencies where the wakil rakyat won with a slim majority.

"We have proven ourselves over the years, being solidly behind the BN and worked relentlessly to help them gain victory in all by-elections," said its secretary-general Mohamed Ibrahim Hussain.

Beginning with the Teluk Kemang by-election in 2000, the party has been making its presence felt by actively campaigning for BN in all by-elections since.

In fact, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi acknowledged Kimma's contributions to BN's victory during the July Anak Bukit by-election in a "live" teleconferencing with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Mohamed Ibrahim said despite Kimma's application to join the BN being put on hold, their members have pledged to continue supporting the coalition and would never consider joining the Opposition.

"Our members are god-fearing and loyal to the rulers.

"We are confident that if we are admitted into the BN, we can play a big role in preventing Muslims from joining Muslim-based Opposition parties," he said.

While there were Opposition parties trying to mislead the Muslims, he said Kimma members, equipped with a sound knowledge of Islam, could reach out to the people and teach them the truth.

Still, the fact remains that back in the 1995 general election, Kimma joined the Gagasan Rakyat - an Opposition coalition comprising Semangat 46, Berjasa, Hamim, Parti Rakyat Malaysia and the Indian Progressive Front.

Mohamed Ibrahim said Kimma realised its mistake when it joined the front and its members had since pledged to help the BN achieve zero-Opposition.

"We were in Gagasan for only a month. At that time, some members were frustrated when the party's application to join the BN was not considered.

"That was a big mistake and we sent our apology to the Prime Minister. We pulled out of Gagasan as quickly as we joined," he said.

Although there were some Indian Muslims who had joined parties like Umno and MIC, Mohamed Ibrahim said there was no substitute to having a party to represent the community's needs, especially in the legislation.

He said the party would not consider becoming part of the MIC as Kimma was formed on Islamic fundamentals and its political struggles were different.

"As far as Umno is concerned, though we are united through Islam, there are still certain things we have to fight for our community on our own," he said.

He said because of their Indian origin, they (Indian Muslims) sometimes find themselves in a dilemma, especially with regard to university entry quotas and applications for low-cost housing.

"There is no such thing as quota for Indian Muslims and this sometimes leaves us in the dark," he said.

Kimma president Mohamed Hanifa said the party felt that by joining the BN, they could resolve many of these issues and better serve the community.

He said it was Kimma's vision to make the Indian Muslims an educated community, where everyone is equipped with the latest knowledge, especially in information technology.

"We aim to eradicate poverty among the Indian Muslims and develop them into a strong business and manufacturing-based community," he said.

To achieve these objectives, Mohamed Hanifa said admission into the BN would help. At present, the stumbling block to Kimma's entry was the consensus system practised by the coalition.

If one party objected to the admission of a new member, then its application would be put on hold.

"We are not a threat to any party. We only want to help strenghten BN. The MIC should never fear our presence. In the Teluk Kemang by-election (won by MIC candidate S. Sothinathan), we delivered all 1,813 Indian Muslim votes in the constituency.

"After all, the more component parties in the coalition, the stronger it is," said Mohamed Hanifa.

But Kimma is not giving up hope that one day, the party will be admitted into the ruling coalition although its application has been in the KIV (keep in view) list since its inception.

"We are like a tributary which will flow into the main stream. But we will not support Barisan Alternatif or other opposition parties. We hope one day we will be admitted," said Mohamed Hanifa.