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Parti Punjabi willing to wait for admission into BN

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FORMED in 1986, Parti Punjabi Malaysia has since gained recognition as among the most hardworking and consistent parties in the country.

Despite several unsuccessful attempts to become part of the Barisan Nasional coalition, its deputy president Jaswant Singh Khosa says its 3,000 odd members are "100 per cent loyal to the Government and willing to wait, no matter how long, for admission".

"That has never been and will never be an issue. No matter how many times our application to join the BN is rejected, we will continue trying.

"It is my solemn belief that most Punjabis in the country love our Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and will forever remain loyal to the ruling Government," he said.

When the party was formed by the late Jeswant Singh about 15 years ago, Jaswant said there were many negative reactions from others, including from those within the community itself.

Undeterred, he said Jeswant continued to work hard to recruit members and organise regular activities for the party.

"Today, we have more than 3,000 members nationwide and boast more than 45 branches," said Jaswant.

Unfortunately, he said from the 100,000 over Punjabis in the country, only fewer than 5,000 are registered voters.

"Our main task now is to embark on a nationwide exercise to register as many Punjabi voters as possible before the next general election.

"We must remember that Punjabis are the fourth largest community in the country and are very capable of making a difference to the outcome of any general election," he said, stressing that the community had always been a silent supporter behind the BN.

However, Jaswant expressed hope that the BN leadership would give serious consideration to their application to join the coalition.

"We have contributed so much to the country in so many ways, but until today, we have no political power at all," added Jaswant.

He stressed that the party, if admitted into BN, would not lobby to contest in the general election or ask for seats in local councils. The party only wants the Punjabi community's views to be heard when the Government draws up policies.

He said there were still numerous problems faced by the community, including temple issues which can only be best resolved by a member of its own community.

"There is no point in us considering joining any other political party. We Punjabis have our own customs and traditions which would be difficult to be understood by another community," he said.

He said PPM is still young and most of its members are in their 30s and have plenty of knowledge and strength to offer.

Jaswant, 65, who was an MIC member for 10 years and a vice-president of the Tangkak MIC division, said he decided to leave the MIC years ago as it could not understand the needs of the Punjabis.

There have been different inter-pretations as to when the Punjabis arrived in Malaysia but most historians concur that they were brought in by the British in the early 1870s.

According to social anthropologist Sarjit Singh Gill, the first Punjabis were recruited by the Sarawak Rajah Sir James Brooke from Singapore in 1857 to quell Chinese uprising in his territory.

The Punjabis were then British political prisoners in Malacca and Singapore. Some historians claim that the first two Punjabis brought to Singapore in the late 1840s were Nihal Singh (a.k.a. Bhai Maharaj Singh) and Kharak Singh.

Jaswant, who is now acting as president for the party following the death of Jeswant, 83, on Sept 15, said he was confident the party membership would increase to more than 5,000 if PPM was to be admitted into the BN. He said many Punjabis were still hesitant to join the PPM as they felt the party did not have a clear political direction.

"However, we feel that despite not being in the BN, our presence is noticed, especially at by-elections where we send our members to work and ensure BN's victory," he said.

Jaswant said it should be realised that PPM has always been a team player and is more than willing to work together for the betterment of the country.

"It is time the BN realised how much our community can contribute to the country. More than 30,000 Punjabis here are professionals and their combined efforts could be tremendous.

"It has always been Jeswant's hope that the party become part of the BN and I will continue the struggle until the day I die or the party is admitted into the coalition," he added.