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PM wants MIC panel to look into problems

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KUALA LUMPUR: MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu said the party should have announced its efforts immediately, whenever it did something for the Indian community in the past.

He said the party will do so from now.

Speaking to reporters after chairing the party's central working committee meeting yesterday, he disclosed that he had a meeting with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on Wednesday to discuss the social and economic problems faced by the community.

He said Abdullah asked the party to set up a committee to look into the problems.

Samy Vellu also said that four months ago, the party had submitted a report to Abdullah on a mechanism to implement the Ninth Malaysia Plan effectively for the community.

"The prime minister is quite sympathetic to the community's problems. We are not a lazy party. I will study the cabinet reports every three to four months to see what has been done for the community, and if it is not done, I will report immediately to Abdullah," he said.

Among the issues that had been discussed were the lack of job opportunities for the community and a committee to look into the employment of Indian civil servants.

"I will talk to the Public Services Department and other government agencies on how the community can secure jobs as civil servants," he said.

Samy Vellu said the MIC will set up a call centre in the next three months to receive complaints on social issues, Tamil schools as well as temple-related matters.

He said the party is not worried about the claims made by the Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf).

Observers said, however, last Sunday's demonstration organised by Hindraf shows that there is discontent among some in the community, who complain that their rights and well-being have been neglected.

Samy Vellu, who is the works minister, was also asked if the government would extend the highway concession periods instead of allowing the concessionaires to raise toll rates. He said the banks would not agree to this, as their agreements stated clearly the repayment deadline.

On Wednesday, he announced that toll charges will go up by between 7% and 50% as agreed in concession agreements for the following highways: Seremban-Port Dickson, North-South Expressway Central Link, Kulim-Butterworth, Malaysia-Singapore Second Link and New North Klang Bypass.

Also affected are the Causeway and Bukit Kayu Hitam Toll Plaza.

He said the government would have to fork out RM344 million in compensation next year if the toll rates were not raised.