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Pandithan denies talk of merger with PPP

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Indian Progressive Front president Senator M.G Pandithan denied today that the party would be dissolved to make way for its members to join the People's Progressive Party.

Expressing shock over reports on the merger, he said what had been agreed upon was the need for closer co-operation.

"There has never been any mention of a merger. I was surprised to read about it in the newspapers."

"IPF is prepared to work with anyone who believes in the spirit and struggle of the Barisan Nasional. But there has never been any question of dissolving the IPF."

Pandithan said he would "rather die than see the party dissolved", adding it would be an act of betrayal to disband the IPF without prior consultation with its members who, he claimed, numbered 500,000.

He was speaking after the party's fifth general assembly which was opened by Umno Youth chief Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

On Wednesday, PPP president Datuk M. Kayveas said the party was prepared to absorb IPF members.

He said that leaders of the two parties had begun negotiations on the matter several months ago and had agreed to work closely.

Kayveas said IPF members could join PPP as associate members to determine whether they could all be "comfortable" working together.

On its bid to join the BN, Pandithan said the IPF would appeal to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is also BN chairman, to review the consensus system which requires that applications by new parties to join the coalition be agreed upon by all component parties.

(IPF's application has been unsuccessful so far due to MIC objections).

Pandithan likened the consensus system to the veto power held by the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, saying both were obsolete.

Asked if he was confident that the party would be accepted into the BN, Pandithan said it would be accepted eventually as "reality would prevail".

He said this could be seen from the support the party received from the Indian community.

Ahmad Zahid said Umno Youth had adopted an open attitude towards the IPF joining the BN, adding that he did not see any reason for the party's bid to be rejected.

Asked whether Umno Youth endorsed the move, he said: "I think their open attitude is stronger than an endorsement."

He said if the consensus system was obstructing the IPF's admittance into the BN, then Umno Youth was ready to ask Dr Mahathir for the system to be reviewed.

On whether relations with thw MIC would be strained following the IPF's call for the consensus system to be abolished, Ahmad Zahid said both sides would discuss the matter.

He said facts and realities had to be accepted, adding that the IPF had a role to play in championing the interests of the Indians.

Earlier in his speech, Ahmad Zahid called on the Indian community to bury their differences and work towards development.

What was important he said, were not parties like the MIC and IPF and their leaders, but that Indian social, political and economic standards be raised.

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