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PPP prepared to absorb IPF and Pandithan

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - The People's Progressive Party is prepared to absorb Indian Progressive Front president Senator M.G. Pandithan and its estimated 500,000 members into the party.

PPP president Datuk M. Kayveas said today leaders of the two parties had begun negotiations on the matter several months ago and agreed to work closely together.

He said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is the BN chairman, would be consulted when details of the proposed merger were finalised.

He said with IPF members joining PPP, which now has about 220,000 members, the party would become the third largest party in the Barisan Nasional.

Initially, Kayveas said, IPF members could join PPP as associate members. This was to determine whether members of the two parties were "comfortable" working together.

If they were, he said, the IPF would be dissolved with its members joining the PPP as ordinary members.

"We (PPP and IPF) will increase our supporters for the next general election and become a force to be reckoned with," he said at the PPP's open house in conjunction with the New Year at Lake Garden.

The PPP held similar celebrations in Ipoh, Penang, Seremban and Malacca. It also collected donations for victims of the Greg storm in Sabah.

Kayveas said even after the IPF members, who were all Indians, joined it, the PPP would remain a multi-racial party.

He said the PPP decided to explore the possibility of working with IPF following Umno's decision to absorb Parti Melayu Semangat 46 members into the party.

He said PPP leaders had met with Pandithan to work details of the proposed merger.

"If everything goes well, I will meet Pandithan to finalise the details before the Chinese New Year and Hari Raya (in the first week of next month)."

Kayveas said the proposed merger would allow IPF leaders, particularly Pandithan, to join the BN since the MIC was against another Indian-based party being admitted into the coalition.

Because of the MIC's objection, the BN had rejected the IPF's application to join the coalition last year.

Pandithan, a former MIC vice-president, formed the IPF in 1989 after being sacked from MIC for indiscipline. The IPF subsequently joined the opposition during the 1990 general election.

In the 1995 general election, IPF supported the BN.

On whether Pandithan would be given a post in the PPP if the merger materialised, Kayveas said Pandithan had said he did not want any position.

"There are people in and outside PPP who are not happy to see Pandithan joining it," he said, adding that the PPP leaders would consider all views before making any decision.

On whether Pandithan's entry into the PPP with his supporters would lead to problems within the PPP itself, Kayveas said there were such fears among the party members.

"We will cross the bridge when we come to it."

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