

26/01/2001

Easier for BN if Indians unite under one party, says PM

Zubaidah Abu Bakar; Elizabeth John

JITRA, Thurs. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said it will be easier for the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition to promote racial unity if the majority of Indians unite under one Indian-based party.

Dr Mahathir, who is also BN chairman, said the All Malaysian Indian Progressive Front should therefore consider MIC's invitation for it to rejoin the party as the move would reunite the Indians.

"The fact is that we have the MIC and IPF ... MIC is Indian (based) and IPF is also Indian (based).

"If they do not unite, there is disunity," he said, adding that BN welcomed the move to invite IPF president Datuk M.G. Pandithan and his followers to rejoin the MIC.

Dr Mahathir said MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu had also given an assurance that Pandithan would be given a fair deal should he decide to accept the offer.

Pandithan was expelled as MIC vice-president in 1988 and he formed the IPF shortly after.

Yesterday, Samy Vellu said although Pandithan would not automatically qualify for a party post, he would command the same respect as given to him when he was in the MIC.

The Prime Minister, who is on a two-day working visit to Kedah, was speaking to reporters after attending a Hari Raya gathering at Sekolah Menengah Jitra organised by the Kubang Pasu Umno Youth today. Dr Mahathir was asked on the offer by Samy Vellu to IPF members to return to the MIC.

Dr Mahathir said it was unfortunate that BN was unable to accept IPF as its member despite the party having proven its undivided support to the coalition front all along.

The BN, he said, failed to get all its 14 members to agree to accept IPF and that was why IPF could not be accepted as a member.

"We cannot accept IPF in BN because the coalition needed to get the approval of all its members before it can accept a new party.

"That was why even if the IPF had applied a long time ago to join BN and had supported BN during elections, we cannot accept it as our member.

"If IPF is keen to join MIC, it would be much easier for us," he added.

Dr Mahathir later attended a Chinese New Year gathering at SRJKC Yih Min in Changloon which was organised by the Kubang Pasu MCA.

(END)