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Invitation from MIC a win-win situation for Pandithan - or is it?

Balan Moses

THE equation involving the MIC, Indian Progressive Front and Peoples Progressive Party seems to be as confusing as ever with Datuk M.G. Pandithan's latest move in the matter.

The IPF Central Working Committee's decision on Sunday to include the PPP as another option for members to consider in the event of the party merging with a Barisan Nasional component adds to the puzzle that is Indian politics.

What appeared to be a straight-forward proposal from MIC chief Datuk S. Samy Vellu to Pandithan over a possible merger of the two parties has somehow expanded to include the PPP.

Unwittingly or otherwise, the PPP has been drawn into the process which will determine the IPF's future.

The logical question at this juncture will be who would ultimately benefit from such political manoeuvring.

From the MIC point of view, Pandithan's quixotic response to Samy Vellu's offer in identifying the PPP as a second choice represents no real rebuff to the party.

Samy Vellu's offer of a merger between the MIC and the IPF should be seen as part of the continuum of "friendly relations" between the two parties since the IPF left the Gagasan Rakyat in 1995 to support the BN.

It was the logical step to take for the MIC chief whose party could have benefited from the infusion of strength, however disputed the claim, from the IPF.

Seen in chess terms, Samy Vellu's move could be likened to a gambit in which the chessman usually sacrifices a pawn to secure an advantageous position.

Observers feel Samy Vellu was trying to counter the PPP's advances to the IPF by offering Pandithan a place in the MIC, despite having to accommodate Pandithan and his supporters.

It may appear that Pandithan has effectively increased IPF's value as a suitor for the MIC with the overture to the PPP but some say that is a pyrrhic victory at best.

In politics, long-term benefits often far outweigh short-term gains.

While the former MIC vice-president and the IPF appear to be holding the trump card at the moment, they must take a long, hard look at what they may be missing.

The reality of the situation is that the MIC represents Indians in the Barisan Nasional and that an alliance should logically be forged with it in the interest of Indian unity.

The exchange between Samy Vellu and Pandithan over whether the MIC should submit a written proposal to the IPF on the merger can be dismissed as mere rhetoric.

The PPP, which may look attractive to Pandithan, is for the record a multi-racial party despite the preponderance of Indians in it.

Pandithan, with his largely Tamil support in the IPF, could eventually find himself and his supporters marginalised in the PPP which espouses multi-racial politics.

IPF members would be well advised to remember that it may be better to be a big fish in a small pond than vice-versa.

The MIC, on the other hand, with its 40-year history, a proven administration and real politik that Pandithan is acquainted with, would

seem a better choice.

From the PPP perspective, it seems to be a situation of "heads I win, tails you lose". The party is in a win-win situation whichever way Pandithan and his members decide.

If Pandithan opts for the PPP, it would strengthen Indian representation in the latter and help it stake a claim as the second largest party representing Indians in the country.

Observers say the PPP can survive without the IPF, given Kayveas' obvious panache in consolidating his position in the party and in the Barisan Nasional. His appointment as Deputy Housing Minister is a coup of sorts for the party which has been struggling for a national image since losing its four parliamentary constituencies and 18 State seats over the years.

The 47-year-old's mastery of political craft is commendable, given the short time that he has been in the fray.

With or without the IPF, the PPP seems well on the road to success. The next general election will determine how well the PPP has endeared itself to the electorate.

Of more immediate concern is the effect of the internecine battles between Kayveas and Samy Vellu which have left their mark on the inter-party relationship.

Things came to a boil last year with an exchange of scathing remarks on the alleged movement of members both ways.

Given the fact that there is no love lost between them, Kayveas' advice to Pandithan to respect Samy Vellu's offer and act accordingly is puzzling.

Have they truly made up in the Barisan nasional spirit? Is all well between the PPP and the MIC?

These are questions making the rounds of Indian political circles and only a decision at the IPF ninth general assembly on Sunday will put them to rest.

For the IPF, the latest move may prove fatal to its cause of eventually joining the Barisan Nasional.

While Pandithan's question of how the nuptials between the IPF and MIC can proceed without the groom seeing the bride shows his political mettle, his foot-dragging may prove disastrous in the final analysis.

It may leave the IPF in the political wilderness that has been home to the party since its birth in 1989 after Pandithan's exit from the MIC.

There is only one way into the Barisan Nasional and that is if all BN component parties agree to the admission of a potential member. And this is not likely to change.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad made this known in no uncertain terms recently with his remark that the IPF's entry into the BN had been thwarted by the lack of consensus among BN members on the matter.

This leaves Pandithan and his delegates with very little real choice in the matter come Sunday.

It may be that IPF members may reject both the MIC and the PPP and elect to retain the status quo.

Whichever way it goes, political maturity has to be the order of the day. Personal interests have to take a back seat to the needs of the Indian community.

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