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IPF-Vote

IPF DELEGATES TO VOTE ON SUNDAY TO DECIDE PANDITHAN'S FUTURE

By: E. Sivabalan

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 9 (Bernama) -- Delegates to the ninth Indian Progressive Front (IPF) general assembly will decide on Sunday the fate of their "Thalaivan" (leader) and their decade-old "Khatchi" (party).

A total of 2,950 delegates will vote by way of ballot either to remain with the party, join the MIC or merge with the People's Progressive Party (PPP).

"It is going to be a very tough decision especially when you have both the prime minister and deputy prime minister urging IPF members to accept the MIC's offer," said an IPF leader.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in his foreward message contained in the souvenir book published in conjunction with the general assembly, said given the challenging political scenario, it was vital for the entire nation to remain united and to forge close cooperation with one another.

"We must realise that only a stable nation can ensure peace and harmony for all and the nation," said Dr Mahathir.

If Dr Mahathir's statement is any indication for delegates to vote in favour of the MIC's offer, it will be even more difficult for them to make a decision.

As if the Prime Minister's message is not enough, the one-day assembly will be officiated by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi who is expected to drive home the point that Indians must unite to face the challenges of the coming years.

Although the IPF has invited MIC leaders to attend its general assembly, it is not known if the MIC will be represented by any of its office-bearers.

MIC president Datuk Seri S.Samy Vellu made a "gentleman's offer" to IPF chief, Datuk M.G.Pandithan, an ex-MIC vice-president, and his party members to rejoin the MIC in a bid to unite the Indians.

Pandithan, still bitter over the MIC's decision to sack him in 1988 for alleged indiscipline, is playing hard to get. "It is not my decision but the decision of the members," he said recently.

While Pandithan has maintained that he will not decide for his members, a new twist to the drama has emerged, just three days before the IPF general assembly.

PPP's president Datuk M.Kayveas announced that his party's doors are closed for Pandithan but IPF members are, however, free to join the PPP.

But, Kayveas's unexpected statement is not likely to change the decision of the IPF's Central Working Committee (CWC) which will maintain the PPP as one of the three options in the ballot paper.

An IPF source told Bernama that there are mixed feelings on the ground with some calling on the IPF leadership to take up the MIC's offer.

Pandithan's hardcore supporters claim that if the delegates vote in favour of the MIC's proposal, Pandithan will be doomed.

Although Samy Vellu has indicated that he would appoint Pandithan to the CWC, thus creating a platform for Pandithan to vie for top posts in the MIC, Pandithan's supporters say they are not convinced.

They felt that while Samy Vellu is sincere in his offer, there will be others in the MIC who may want to "sabotage" Pandithan if he rejoined the MIC.

Pandithan's re-entry into the MIC might spell trouble for some MIC leaders who fear that Pandithan would re-group his former loyalists in the

MIC and mount a challenge against them in the future.

It is highly unlikely that Pandithan, 61, who has almost reached the pinnacle of his political career, could ever pose a threat to the "so-called" future leaders in the MIC.

Should the delegates vote the MIC in their ballot papers, the IPF would likely be dissolved or possibly taken over by disgruntled members, a move that would put the issue of Indian unity back to square one.

Whether their choice will be the IPF, MIC or PPP, one thing is for sure, the struggle to achieve unity among the Indian community is still a long way off.

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