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IPF delegates vote overwhelmingly against joining MIC

Ramlan Said; Patrick Sennyah; Sajahan Waheed

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Indian Progressive Front delegates today voted against dissolving the party, with only one vote supporting the proposal that the party be disbanded and members joining MIC.

Of the 2,949 delegates who voted, 2,945 decided that IPF should remain as it is. One vote was cast in favour of joining the People's Progressive Party while there were two spoilt votes.

IPF president Datuk M.G. Pandithan abstained from voting at the party's ninth general assembly held at the Putra World Trade Centre.

It was opened by Deputy Prime Minister and Barisan Nasional deputy chairman Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The voting was held following an invitation from MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu for Pandithan and IPF members to join MIC.

PPP president Datuk M. Kayveas had also invited IPF members with the exception of Pandithan to join PPP, for the sake of Indian unity.

In an immediate response, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said in Kota Kinabalu that he was disappointed with the decision.

"I am disappointed because we have a problem in not being able to accept IPF into the BN while we recognise IPF as a staunch supporter of BN," said Dr Mahathir, who is BN chairman.

As soon as the results were announced by election committee head Lt-Kol (R) Dr Harcharan Singh, it was greeted by thunderous cheers and shouts of *Hidup Pandithan*. Pandithan was also hoisted by supporters.

At a Press conference later, Pandithan said he would abide by the delegates' decision who wanted the party to continue with its struggle.

"I will send a letter to the BN leadership on the results and also meet Dr Mahathir to explain the matter," he said adding that he would leave the future of IPF to the political wisdom of the Prime Minister.

He said apart from MIC, the other component parties in BN supported IPF's entry.

"Though being two separate entities, I am prepared to meet Samy Vellu for the sake of unity and co-operation."

Pandithan said the problems of the Indian community were concentrated more among the grassroots and it was best for Samy Vellu to set aside all differences between them and work together to overcome this.

"I will meet him but I won't invite him to join IPF and he should no longer invite me to join MIC or block our entry into the BN."

Asked if he had any strategies to ensure IPF was accepted into BN, Pandithan said: "I believe in hardwork. I have many young members and the BN leadership recognises this."

Dr Mahathir said the easy way for IPF to be part of the BN was for its members to join the MIC or PPP.

"But it looks like they are not interested (in joining the MIC or PPP) so we cannot do anything," he said.

He was speaking at a Press conference after a meeting with Umno branch leaders, including from the Youth and Wanita movement, from the Gaya and Tanjung Aru division, at the Kuwasa Complex, here today.

Asked if the BN will consider accepting the IPF as a party into the BN's fold, Dr Mahathir said: "We cannot because it (decision to admit a party into the BN) has to be by consensus."

On the implication of the IPF's decision, Dr Mahathir said he hoped the party would continue to support the BN from outside.

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