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Let good sense prevail, though IPF has cast the die against merger

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THE die has been cast. By rejecting both the MIC and the People's Progressive Party as merger partners, the Indian Progressive Front has indicated that nothing will change its chartered course of joining the Barisan Nasional as a component party.

The decision by delegates to the IPF annual general assembly yesterday is a clear message that they are prepared to take their chances in going it alone into the ruling coalition.

The fact that only one each of the 2,949 delegates voted to merge the party with the MIC and the PPP respectively was telling of the disdain with which delegates considered the proposals.

Besides showing that a backdoor approach to entry into the BN was not their idea of politics, it was also a stinging rebuke to the MIC and the PPP, both of which have been courting IPF members in their own way.

The writing had been on the wall even prior to the assembly when the IPF central working committee decided to name the PPP as another option for a merger.

It is understood that there were strong calls at that meeting for an outright rejection of the MIC proposal for a merger with some expressing dismay that such an offer had even been made.

Their outrage could be seen in yesterday's decision which was made without prompting from IPF president Datuk M.G. Pandithan who chose to remain silent on the matter, however puzzling that may be.

It was the delegates' way of paying back MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu in his own currency, given the lukewarm invitation to Pandithan and his supporters to rejoin the MIC.

What is also clear is that Pandithan's discomfort at being "offered" a CWC seat in the event of his returning to the MIC did not go unnoticed by members who shared his ire at being "ridiculed".

The same could be said for PPP chief Datuk M. Kayveas who had wanted IPF members but not Pandithan.

It looks like the PPP will never again be a part of the political equation involving the IPF.

The effect of the IPF decision does not stop there. It speaks volumes of Pandithan's grip on members and their personal loyalty to him, built over more than a decade of being away from the MIC.

It also shows their estrangement from the MIC has seen them mature into astute politicians in their own right, capable of making difficult decisions.

That they have also effectively cut ties with the MIC and are comfortable on their own is also amply clear.

It is also an indication of the confidence that IPF members have in the party and their resolve in winning a place in the BN solely on merit.

This has been the direction that Pandithan has been pointing to in the past six years after his decision to support the BN following a brief and unfruitful alliance with the opposition Gagasan Rakyat.

The former MIC vice-president who was instrumental in ensuring a BN victory in the Teluk Kemang by-election seems to have prepared a strong case for admission to the BN.

The IPF effort in the Lunas by-election last year, despite the eventual result which saw the seat falling to Keadilan, also gained it points in its mission to join the BN.

BN component parties, specifically the MIC, have to seriously consider the importance of the IPF's 380,000 members and 150,000 supporters come election time.

This is given the narrow margins with which the BN won in some constituencies the last time around.

While it may have taken a lot to convince Samy Vellu to invite Pandithan to join the MIC, he must show that his invitation to the latter is genuine.

He has to take into consideration Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's recent statement urging Pandithan to seriously consider the MIC's merger proposal.

Half-hearted and lacklustre merger proposals will not see fruition however hard anyone tries to make them succeed.

Pandithan has indicated that he will be writing to Dr Mahathir, who is also BN chairman, to renew the IPF's six-year-old request to join the BN.

It is obvious that Pandithan and the IPF will not be the losers if the party is still kept out of the BN. What is clear is that the coalition cannot afford to ignore Pandithan and his plaintive plea to join its ranks.

The MIC holds the cards that will decide the IPF's fate. Old animosities and personality differences cannot figure in any decision on IPF seeking to join the BN.

Nobody should accuse the MIC of cutting its nose to spite its face in the matter.

Good sense should prevail for the ultimate good of the ruling coalition. That Pandithan has rejected the opposition for good must be given its due importance when an eventual solution is worked out in the matter.

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