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Pandithan: I'm being ridiculed

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Indian Progressive Front president Datuk M.G. Pandithan, indicating that the party will decline the MIC offer of a merger, said the offer of a Central Working Committee post was "like ridiculing me".

He said he never expected a post in the event he returned to the MIC as his policy was to contest for positions.

"Even if you give me a Central Working Committee post, I'm not interested. It's like he (MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu) is ridiculing me. I never asked for that. I want to contest and win," he told the New Sunday Times.

The former MIC vice-president was expelled in 1988 after being charged with indiscipline.

He said he had asked for the MIC constitution after the initial offer of a merger by Samy Vellu to identify the rights of expelled members.

However, he said, Samy Vellu had declined to provide either the constitution or the written proposals on the proposed merger.

Asked why he felt Samy Vellu was inviting the party back into the MIC after 12 years, he replied he was puzzled by the offer.

"I don't know why he has invited me now especially since my delegates conference is around the corner (to be held tomorrow)."

To a question on whether he felt members would lean towards joining the People's Progressive Party led by Datuk M. Kayveas, he said there had been a lot of unwarranted comments from Kayveas on the merger proposal.

"I only hope they will not join the Opposition. If all the members choose the PPP, then the choice is up to them. Pandithan is immaterial."

He said Kayveas was childish to say that he should go back to the MIC "as he does not know Samy Vellu."

On how he expected delegates to vote, he said he was prepared to accept their decision.

"As far as I am concerned, I feel I have done my duty well and if members choose to continue to struggle, I will go with them. It is their choice."

His reluctance to rejoin the MIC, he said, stemmed from the fact that he did not want to be put in a similar situation as in 1988 when he was sacked from the party.

"I also risk being sacked again, if not by Samy Vellu, by some other leader if I bring the issue of the interests of the grassroots up if I ever join the MIC."

Pandithan, a former Trade and Industry Ministry Parliamentary Secretary and senator, said it would be better for the IPF to remain independent and wait for admission into the Barisan Nasional.

He said the IPF had given him an opportunity to speak of the problems affecting the grassroots which he claimed he could not do in the MIC.

"A separate identity is better because we can co-operate to work for the betterment of the community. There will be no suspicion among us. You will not worry about me taking over and I don't have to worry about being sacked."

Asked if he felt a merger between the IPF and MIC would lead to greater unity among the Indians, he said it was a good idea on paper.

"But the style and ideas are different. Samy Vellu has two roles to play, that of political leader and another of community leader in the

broader spectrum. I have two roles to play also. One is a community role, especially where the grassroot community which needs much attention and focus is concerned."

Commenting on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's recent statement that IPF's entry into the BN had been held up by the lack of consensus among BN component parties, he said there was nothing wrong with two Indian-based parties being in the BN.

"There are Malay and Chinese-based parties working in the BN. No one should suspect IPF's intentions. We could both work together for the betterment of the people."

Outlining IPF's role within the Indian community, he said it was to safeguard the welfare of the poor and down trodden.

"We have a role to play to alleviate this problem and let them have the same status as other Indians."

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