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What's in it for Pandithan

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu today strongly hinted that All Malaysian Indian Progressive Front president Datuk M.G. Pandithan would be appointed a member of the Central Working Committee if he rejoins the party.

Samy Vellu said the former MIC vice-president would be considered for the position if he accepts the open invitation for him and his supporters to return to the MIC fold.

"I can't ask anybody to resign now but definitely if he comes in, I'll find something for him, there's no difficulty in that.

"As president, I have the power to appoint anybody to the CWC ... when he comes in I won't ask him to sit as an ordinary member, there's no question about it," Samy Vellu said at the MCA Chinese New Year open house at Wisma MCA here.

The offer for IPF members to return to the MIC was made by Samy Vellu after chairing the party's CWC meeting yesterday and Pandithan, when contacted after the announcement, said he needed more time to consider the matter in depth.

Pandithan was expelled as MIC vice-president in 1988 and formed the IPF shortly after that.

Samy Vellu, who is also Works Minister, however, clarified that Pandithan would not automatically qualify for a party post but has to come in as a member first, adding that even so, he (Pandithan) would command the same respect that was given to him when he was in the MIC.

On whether there had been any direct response from Pandithan on the matter, Samy Vellu said there had not been any so far, but added that it was up to the IPF to make its own decision.

To a question, Samy Vellu said MIC grassroots members should be quite happy with the party's decision to invite the IPF.

He said what mattered most was that there must be a noble effort to unite the Indian community to serve under Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's leadership and the Barisan Nasional banner.

Samy Vellu also said that he had known Pandithan for more than 35 years and as such, foresees no problems working with him once again in the party.

"Moreover, he had been my strong supporter for a long time and we have had our share of memorable times."

Meanwhile, at the Gerakan open house here later, he said he was confident that the invitation would not cause factions in the party which he said is a "faction free" one that was committed to serving the Indian community on the political, economic and social platform.

He also advised Pandithan to "take his time" and give careful thought towards the offer made by the MIC.

On whether invitations would be made to other Indian-based political parties to dissolve their parties and rejoin the MIC, Samy Vellu said the offer was only made to Pandithan and his supporters.

"We will only consider them in view of their contributions towards the Barisan Nasional. As for the others, they have aligned themselves towards the opposition and have their own agenda," he said.

Meanwhile, MIC vice-president Datuk S. Veerasingam said the proposal for Pandithan and his party to join MIC was unanimously agreed to by all CWC members during their meeting yesterday.

He said Samy Vellu had made the proposal while the CWC left it solely to the IPF to decide whether to accept it or not.

Veerasingam, who is also the National Unity and Social Development parliamentary secretary, said Samy Vellu had made the proposal in line with the Prime Minister's call to all Malays to unite.

"MIC also noted that the Indians in the country could work better if they were united and therefore decided to extend this invitation in good faith," he said.

He said the IPF had also given the Barisan Nasional good support in the past, especially when campaigning for elections and the MIC wanted them to join for a more unified and concerted effort for the progress of the BN.

He said the MIC could not accept another Indian-based party in the BN as this would only lead to there being too many factions in the community and the people would not be able to accept this.

Meanwhile, BN leaders, when asked on MIC's open invitation, welcomed the move as timely for the sake of BN and national unity.

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said IPF should seriously consider the offer.

"If we view it positively, it's an opportunity for all Indians to unite and this should be good for the MIC and the BN."

Dr Ling said he saw no hidden agenda behind the move except the need to consolidate unity and strength the Indian community.

Umno youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein said while the decision to rejoin MIC rests with IPF, what mattered most was BN unity.

"The numbers (membership) are unimportant but the spirit of cooperation and unity we have inherited from our leaders before this is."

Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik encouraged Pandithan to return to MIC as such a move was good for the BN.

Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding, who is Sarawak United People's Party deputy chairman said the offer by the MIC was a good move.

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