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MIC-Silence (News Analysis)

SUBRA'S DEAFENING SILENCE FUELS SPECULATION IN MIC

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 27 (Bernama) -- Deputy MIC President Datuk S. Subramaniam's deafening silence over a remark made by Indian Progressive Front (IPF) President Datuk M. G. Pandithan is causing widespread speculation in the country's largest Indian-based political party.

Subramaniam, who is the Deputy Minister of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs, has remained silent since the IPF head, who was once a MIC Vice-President, made a controversial call, urging MIC President Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu to step down from the post.

Pandithan, in making the statement early last week, also said that the IPF would be able to join the Barisan Nasional (BN) if Subramaniam was at the helm of the MIC and that the main stumbling block preventing his party from gaining admission to the BN was Samy Vellu.

IPF had on numerous occasions applied to join the ruling coalition but its applications was rejected and it is an open secret that the MIC, led by the Works Minister, was its main obstacle.

Pandithan had made such calls on many occasions in the past but this time around the statement carried more weight as it was made after Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in an interview with Bernama, openly advised all BN component party leaders who had been in their positions for long to consider vacating their posts in favour of younger leaders.

Over the past week there had been various reactions to Pandithan's viewpoint, mostly calling on the IPF head to stay out of MIC politics, since he was no more in the party.

All three MIC Vice-Presidents -- National Unity and Social Development Ministry Parliamentary Secretary Datuk S. Veerasingham, Deputy Rural Development Minister Datuk G. Palanivel and Subang MP Tan Sri K. S. Nijhar -- had asked Pandithan to "mind his own business."

They had also wanted Samy Vellu, who was elected uncontested for the ninth consecutive term as MIC President on March 8, to carry on leading the party.

To compound matters further, yesterday, the People's Progressive Party President, Datuk M. Kayveas, also joined the bandwagon by saying that Samy Vellu was the only leader capable of leading the Malaysian Indian community at present.

"Other than Samy Vellu, I do not see any other leader who is capable of leading the Indian community," the PPP supremo, who is also the Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, told the press.

Subramaniam joined the MIC as an ordinary member in 1962. He rose up the ranks and became the Deputy President for the first time in 1981. He resigned briefly in 1990 and was returned unopposed in 1991 for the same position.

Despite all the flurry of reactions from the Malaysian Indian community leaders, Subramaniam has preferred to stay silent on this matter, even with queries from the press going unheeded.

Bernama today tried several times to contact Subramaniam but could only reach the voice mail of his mobile telephone. In an earlier attempt the Deputy Minister asked to "call later" as he was busy visiting "someone at the hospital".

"Why should he stay silent if he does not have anything to hide. He should be the first one to ask Pandithan to keep out of MIC but this is the

other way around," a MIC division head and an ardent supporter of Samy Vellu, who declined to be identified, said when asked to comment on the issue.

However, some MIC leaders argue that Subramaniam might be silent thinking that this issue would just blow away and that it was just one of Pandithan's "ramblings".

"Why should he (Subramaniam) react to a call made by a former MIC member? If he were to do that then he won't have time for anything else as everyday there would be some disgruntled former MIC member saying something or other about the MIC...it's just a waste of time reacting to these kind of statements," said a division leader, who did not want to be named.

While this was a sensible view, the MIC Deputy President should know that it was important for him to clear the air on the matter as most grassroots leaders were now coming to the conclusion that the MIC boss and his deputy were no longer in good terms.

This could lead to a split in the MIC, which is scheduled to hold its party elections in two years.

While two years is still a long way to go, the general elections are just around the corner and the BN not only needs the full backing from all its component parties but also requires that all its 14 coalition partners are united without any divisions to enable it to be returned with a bigger majority.

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