

10/11/2003

Samy Vellu accuses Pandithan of lying

Zubaidah Abu Bakar; Chow Kum Hor

MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu yesterday accused Indian Progressive Front (IPF) president Datuk M.G. Pandithan of lying to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong by claiming that Tamil daily Malaysian Nanban editorial adviser Athi Kumanan was the IPF deputy president.

Samy Vellu alleged that by so doing, Pandithan got the King to present Athi with an award during His Majesty's birthday celebrations last year.

"I have proof that he is not the deputy president. I challenge him (Athi) to sue me. I believe Athi is an MIC branch member," said Samy Vellu in his winding-up speech at the convention.

Samy Vellu, who is Works Minister, urged Pandithan "not to play with fire" and said he was democratically elected by the delegates in the party election.

Last month, Pandithan, who leads the pro-Barisan Nasional IPF, urged Samy Vellu to step down as MIC president to give others a chance to lead the Indian community, and dismissed as baseless claims that MIC members still needed him.

Pandithan's outburst came following former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's advice to long-serving BN component heads to retire and allow younger leaders to take over.

Pandithan also claimed that Samy Vellu was blocking IPF's admission into BN and said if Samy Vellu was no longer MIC president, IPF would not face problems in joining the coalition.

This led to other MIC leaders coming to Samy Vellu's defence, with the exception of deputy president Datuk S. Subramaniam.

Samy Vellu said he had remained silent on the controversy all this while because he only wanted to clear the air at the convention.

"I was democratically elected as MIC president by the delegates.

"Many of you elected me. Over the past two weeks, I have received over 3,000 SMS (short messaging system) pledging support for me," he told about 9,000 MIC leaders.

On Subramaniam, he said he was not going to be upset with what the deputy president said or did not say during the past few weeks.

He said MIC's focus now was to prepare for the general election.

Meanwhile, Pandithan said he would comment later on what Samy Vellu had said.

"Let me read it in the papers first. I only heard that he went on a rampage attacking me," he said.

Athi could not be reached for comment.