

MIC-IPF merger in the making?
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MIC President S Samy Vellu is open to the idea of a possible merger with the Indian Progressive Front (IPF), led by his 'old friend' MG Pandithan.

"I said to Pandithan, 'anything you want I am agreeable'," Samy Vellu told malaysiakini when met in Batang Berjuntai yesterday.

"If it is merger that he wants, then a merger (it is)," he added.

Until recently, the two leaders were bitter enemies after a massive fallout in 1988. They put aside their differences to appear together on stage in Batang Berjuntai on Sunday to campaign for Barisan Nasional candidate K Parthiban in the Ijok by-election.

Pandithan, 67, who is suffering from cancer, was sacked from MIC in 1988 for allegedly practising caste-politics. He was the party's vice-president and widely seen as Samy Vellu's successor at that time.

In August 1990, he formed IPF and since then, has been on the warpath against Samy Vellu. Pandithan was also part of the opposition coalition - Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah - with Semangat 46 and PAS in the 1990 general election.

IPF then switched its allegiance to BN and earned the reputation of being diligent election workers. However, its numerous applications to join the ruling coalition were vetoed by Samy Vellu.

In recent years, Samy Vellu had said that IPF was irrelevant in the local political scene and rejected any talks of a possible merger between the two Indian-based parties.

IPF was also aligned to Samy Vellu's rival and former deputy president, S Subramaniam.

Unhappiness in IPF

At the Sunday function, Pandithan said that he wanted to bury the hatchet and work with Samy Vellu to help the Indian community.

Prior to this meeting, both leaders met on stage during the 1999 Teluk Kemang by-election in Negri Sembilan. They were campaigning for BN but remained adversaries at that time.

Yesterday, Samy Vellu said he was happy their differences have been resolved. He added that he would agree to whatever Pandithan proposed in relation to how MIC and IPF can work together.

"I told him to take his time and not to do anything in a rush. I told him whatever you want, you let me know and we will do it," he said.

Questioned on the possibility of Pandithan deciding against a merger and insisting on his party being given a BN membership, the MIC president replied: "We'll think of that later."

Pandithan was not available for comment but his aide said the ailing leader has to consult his party members first before making any decision.

However, a former IPF state leader disapproved of any ties with 'arch-rival' MIC.

"I can't believe Pandithan shared the same stage with Samy Vellu, a person he has criticised for the past 20 years," said the leader, who was also a member of IPF's central working committee until recently. He wished to remain anonymous.

"Pandithan barred us from attending funerals and marriages involving any MIC friends. He even stopped us from reading Tamil Nesan because it was a MIC paper.

"Now, he is holding hands with Samy Vellu, talking about being united for the sake of the community. How come Pandithan did not realise this before?" he asked.

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