

## **Malay groups hit out at MIC over Dr M's 'slipper garland'**

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A group of Malay organisations in Penang have today demanded MIC president S Samy Vellu to bring the delegate, who suggested a 'slipper garland' for Dr Mahathir Mohamed, to meet and personally apologise to the former premier.

The group comprising 49 Malay - Muslim based organisations in the state explained that would be the best way to resolve the controversy before it gets too late.

"We hope the MIC president will bring the delegate to personally apologise to Dr Mahathir.

"This will stop any future mass protests to be initiated by any angry Malay organisations against such rude suggestions", said the group spokesperson and president of the Penang Malay Association (Pemenang), Yussof Latiff.

A delegate, at last weekend's MIC annual congress, suggested that former Umno president Dr Mahathir's portrait be garlanded with slippers, for allegedly interfering into the party's internal politics.

Yussof rebuked the suggestion, chiding that it was neither a Malay nor Malaysian culture to garland a person with slippers.

### **'Rude, extreme and uncalled for'**

Speaking at a press conference at Pemenang's office in George Town, he slammed the suggestion as being "rude, extreme and uncalled for".

He also lamented that the MIC assembly chairperson had failed to intervene and ticked off the delegate on the spot when the suggestion was being aired.

"The chairperson should have told the delegate to retract his proposal with a warning such as, to throw him out of the hall.

"We are upset that this was not done", he lamented.

The delegate's 'slipper garland' proposal came about when some members vented their anger against Dr Mahathir for claiming in Tamil daily *Makkal Osai* that Samy Vellu had done nothing for the Indian community.

### **'Overstayed his welcome'**

Dr Mahathir was also quoted to have said that Samy Vellu had overstayed his welcome by sitting too long as the party's president.

Yussof said MIC delegates should have challenged and countered Dr Mahathir's criticism professionally instead of resorting to an unruly and ill-mannered proposal.

A local Malay community leader Zainol Abidin Hashim told the press conference that Samy Vellu (*right*) should immediately fulfill the group's demand for a public apology before the

controversy blows up into a major national issue.

"The apology would straighten out the situation and calm the many angry Malays throughout the country.

"Dr Mahathir is respected by friends and foes alike", he said.

He warned MIC president Samy Vellu that if this was not done, the situation could worsen and turn into a racial conflict if the Malays take to the streets to protest against the suggestion.

### **'An insult'**

"The slipper garland is an insult to Malays throughout the world, not just in Malaysia," said Zainol Abidin, who claims to represent Malay organisations based in mainland Seberang Perai.

Zainol Abidin (*below*) himself is no stranger to political controversy.

He caused a political storm nationwide in September last year, when he tore former Chief Minister Koh Tsu Koon's portrait in front of Penang Umno building over suspended Bukit Bendera Umno chief Ahmad Ismail's 'Chinese are squatters in the country' comments controversy.

Tanjong Malay Association president Fadzil Shuib said the Malays are upset over such a suggestion from another Malaysian because Dr Mahathir is very much a well respected elderly statesman, in this country and elsewhere.

"Knowing Dr Mahathir, he speaks his mind without fear or favour.

"To suggest a slipper garland for him is inappropriate and disrespect to Dr Mahathir's contributions to this country", he said.

The suggestion had sparked controversy nationwide with Umno vice-president and Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein and national youth leader Khairy Jamaluddin criticising it as "rude, unfair and not reflective of Barisan Nasional's collective spirit."

Samy Vellu has promised to initiate disciplinary action on the delegate while MIC national youth chief T Mohan condemned the suggestion as "improper and not reflective of Indian culture".