

Revelation day for IPF tomorrow

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When IPF president Tan Sri M.G. Pandithan announced that his long-time foe MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu would be the guest-of-honour at the IPF general assembly on July 1, some felt that this meant IPF would soon be dissolved. The party's future will be known tomorrow.

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KUALA LUMPUR: Tomorrow will be a historic day for both the MIC and Indian Progressive Front (IPF) - once bitter rivals, now friends.

For the first time, MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu will open the IPF's general assembly, at the invitation of its president Tan Sri M.G. Pandithan, at Menara PGRM tomorrow.

Their teaming up is expected to transform the political scenario concerning the Indian community and many feel the "partnership" will be for the betterment of the community.

The assembly had been originally scheduled for last Sunday but was postponed as Samy Vellu was with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on an official visit overseas.

Just a year ago, many would have scoffed at the idea of Samy Vellu and Pandithan being friends again.

Now, with the teaming up, many IPF members are uneasy over their president's efforts to become pals



Burying the hatchet: Samy Vellu (left) and Pandithan shaking hands at the IPF ceramah in Taman Seri Cahaya in April. It was the first time they appeared together in public in eight years.

with the MIC.

Pandithan brushed aside such opposition, saying that it was the work of a group of dissidents who were out to tarnish the party's image.

The "dissidents" have been having

a field day making all sorts of allegations via the *Makkal Osai* vernacular newspaper claiming that IPF would soon be dissolved but Pandithan remains unfazed.

Pandithan has said that he would reply to the allegations tomorrow,

and close aides say he is expected to pour cold water on the claims that the party may be dissolved.

After all, Pandithan has always said that he wanted the IPF building to remain as a symbol of the 17-year struggle and work for the betterment of the underclass in the community, IPF Youth chief Ravi Sankar said.

On whether he regretted his past allegations against Samy Vellu, Pandithan said he had decided to forget the past and look to the future.

"Let bygones be bygones. It is not fair to talk about old issues," he said, adding that Samy Vellu had been magnanimous in accepting his friendship without condition.

His animosity turned to admiration when Samy Vellu visited him while he was recuperating in hospital last year.

"I had thought of the animosity and how it had not brought any benefit to the community. I then decided to forget our differences and work with the MIC," he said in a recent interview.

Pandithan campaigned for Barisan

Nasional's K. Parthiban in the Ijok by-election in April and had also attended the MIC general assembly where he was accorded a seat on the stage in May, a first for a non-Barisan Nasional party leader.

Pandithan, who had always regarded Samy Vellu as his mentor, rose up the ranks in MIC and was a party vice-president, Tapah MP and parliamentary secretary to the Trade and Industry Ministry in June 1988.

He was sacked after embarking on a fast-to-death effort to prove that he was not guilty of the charges against him, of inciting violence and unrest within the party.

He had declared that the MIC could only expel him "over his dead body" and threatened to fast to death until all charges against him were dropped.

He also brought along a coffin with him to the MIC headquarters in protest.

After being expelled from MIC on July 16, 1988, Pandithan tried to return to the party but was unsuccessful.

In August 1990, he formed IPF.