

Two voices, one heart

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NO MIC-IPF MERGER BUT PARTIES WILL WORK TOGETHER, SAYS PANDITHAN

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Indian Progressive Front (IPF) will not merge with the MIC. Instead, the two will work together as two voices and one heart for the Indian community.

IPF president Tan Sri M.G. Pandithan and MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu made this promise to the delegates and Barisan Nasional (BN) component parties at IPF's 15th general assembly at Menara PGRM here yesterday.

Samy Vellu officiated at the opening to the general assembly, attended by some 2,500 people, for the first time after the two former foes buried the hatchet earlier this year.

Since then, speculation had been rife, especially in some Tamil dailies, that a merger was possible, causing uneasiness among some quarters. Yesterday, both the leaders said there was no real need to merge.

Pandithan said he will die as an IPF member. "IPF will never be dissolved and we will instead cooperate with MIC and Samy Vellu, including continuing our struggle to join BN and believing in its power-sharing concept," he said in his address.

"Both parties can work hand in hand to uplift the social standing, status, politics, economics and education of the Indian community."

Likening Samy Vellu as the Hindu god Lord Krishna, Pandithan said - without directly

referring the party's longstanding hope to join BN - "Datuk Seri, you know what the (IPF members) want. I am not going to ask you anything, (you know) my wishes."

The IPF has failed in its past attempts to join BN largely because MIC opposed the presence of another Indian party in the ruling coalition.

Pandithan's speech was emotionally charged. He described Samy Vellu as the number one leader of the Indian community and his political mentor of 40 years.

"This will be a day that will be remembered as even political pundits could not forecast that Datuk Seri will open IPF's meeting," he said.

Pandithan said he has been suffering from an illness for a year and god has given him a new lease of life.

"During this period of illness ... I only thought of you (Samy Vellu) as a great leader of this country. I will only depart from you in my death and today, unity has prevailed and it will be symbolic to the 50 years of independence celebration."

At this point, Samy Vellu, who was on the stage, stood up and hugged Pandithan. Both leaders shed tears while the delegates and guests gave them a standing ovation.

At a press conference later, Samy Vellu was asked why he remained silent on IPF's wish to join BN in his speech following Pandithan's.

"That one I don't know yet. It's



Samy Vellu and Pandithan seal a new beginning with MIC-IPF cooperation.

a matter for me and Pandithan to discuss in our hearts. There are no views on that," he said.

Asked about MIC's past insistence that there could only be one party representing the Indian community in BN, he said: "We have not announced any change in the thinking."

Asked the same questions, Pandithan said: "It's not a one-day job. Let us wait, there is still time."

He said there was no hurry and the party will continue to give undivided support to BN.

Pandithan said IPF and MIC have "merged" in terms of cooperation and unity, but the members will have to decide in time if they want IPF to merge with MIC under one party.

"Let us give time to the members but I will die as an IPF member. Let the boys make the decision later on," he said.

Pandithan also said he was working on a succession plan for

the party, but has yet to find a good leader with leadership skills like Samy Vellu.

He admitted that he was grooming a few potential leaders and was emphasising discipline and the ability to converse in various languages.

Although Samy Vellu did not grant IPF what it really wanted yesterday, MIC did extend support for other concerns.

It contributed RM500,000 for IPF's new headquarters, and education opportunities for the children of IPF members in MIC-run Tafe College and AIMST University.

The delegates, when tabling eight resolutions during the assembly, unanimously welcomed the cooperation with MIC and agreed to continue to support the BN.

Pandithan formed IPF in 1990, after he failed to return to MIC. He was accused of inciting unrest in the party and expelled in 1988.