

## **MIC-IPF Merger On The Cards?**

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**By Prem Kumar Panjamorthy**

KUALA LUMPUR (Bernama) -- To increase its political strength and to maintain its position as the single voice of Malaysian Indians, the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) is said to be considering a merger with the Indian Progressive Front (IPF).

According to a source close to the party, MIC is expected to make the first move to approach IPF, a strong Barisan Nasional (BN) supporter, for the proposed merger, after failed attempts in the past.

In the MIC Central Working Committee (CWC) meeting held on Wesak Day, MIC President Datuk Seri G. Palanivel had signalled his intention to initiate talks with his IPF counterpart, Datuk M. Sambanthan.

To woo IPF into MIC, Palanivel is also expected to offer a MIC-quota senate seat to Sambanthan, as a recognition to the services and support rendered by the 23-year old party to the national front.

"The intention is for both parties to remain as a single voice of the Malaysian Indians. MIC and IPF have established a long-time cordial relationship," the source, a veteran in the 67-year-old MIC, said.

IPF had also been urging BN to accept the Indian-based party as a Barisan component member, given its long-standing support towards the coalition, and help solve problems.

Currently, MIC is the sole Indian representative in BN.

The MIC-IPF merger proposal arose twice before during the leadership of former MIC President, Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu.

IPF was always regarded as a 'sister-party' to MIC as its first President, the late Tan Sri M.G. Pandithan was a former MIC Vice-President, before he was expelled in 1988 for being critical against the party's then leader, Samy Vellu.

Two years later, together with thousands of defectors from MIC, Pandithan formed IPF and they have been staunch BN supporters since then.

For the contributions of the party towards BN, Pandithan was appointed as senator in 1995 by former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

However, after his death in May 2008, no leader from IPF had been appointed to a post in the government.

As such, Sambanthan, who is a protege of Pandithan, may be enticed to hold a "MIC senatorship" to represent IPF in the government, which in return would strengthen the position and image of the party.

MIC has more than 500,000 members, with over 3,700 branches while IPF has 135,000 members.

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