

Two immigrants, representing two different ethnic communities, are competing for votes in Tallaght South. But rather than see each other as rivals, they are looking to co-operate, they tell **VIKTOR POSUDNEVSKY**

ZIMBABWE-BORN Tendai Madondo and Baby Pereppadan from India wish each other well. In fact, they even appear to have made a pact to share votes. The Indian candidate has asked Indians in Tallaght to give their second preference to Madondo, while she is understood to have done the same for him with African voters.

“We are going together,” says Pereppadan. “My community is going to give her second preference.”

“I am looking forward to working with him,” adds Madondo. “It’s better than working against each other. We can achieve a lot more together.”

Both candidates will need all the support they can get if they are to succeed on polling day. On the face of it, Madondo is the more likely of the two to win a seat.

She certainly has the higher profile, having been courted by several political parties – among them Fianna Fáil, whose TD for Tallaght Conor Lenihan is known to have worked with her on a number of projects.

However, Madondo opted instead for the Green Party because it provided “a freer platform to speak on issues that are important for the community,” she explains. Yet some sources have described Madondo’s falling out with Fianna Fáil as “a mystery”.

Meanwhile Pereppadan, who is running as an independent, also has his strengths – not least of which being his unique first name.

“Most people are against parties now,” says the Indian, explaining the advantages of running as an independent. Furthermore, there is a “huge” number of Indians living in Tallaght, and Pereppadan is sure that up to 95 per cent of them will give their first preference to him.

“Unless they’re on holidays or working night shifts,” he adds.

And even though no political party supports his campaign in Ireland, Pereppadan has important backers abroad. He says the Indian Foreign Minister Pranjab Mukherjee has urged Indians and Malays living in Ireland to vote for him.

Pereppadan is working hard on his campaign, conducting intensive voter registration drives – he says he got more than 150 people to sign on the register in less than two weeks of canvassing.

And both candidates say apart from their own community's support, they are also getting significant attention from the Irish share of the electorate.

"Right now what everybody wants is change," says Madondo. "People want enthusiastic politicians; they don't care that I'm a foreigner."

"I don't separate immigrants and Irish," adds Pereppadan. "I'm a candidate for everybody."

Yet despite their confidence, the outcome of the 5 June elections is still highly uncertain – even for the more experienced politicians. For example, it is a fact that Tallaght's immigrant population has increased dramatically in the last five years, but how many of the new arrivals will come out to vote?

"It's a really hard one to call," says Mayor of South Dublin Marie Corr, who is running as a local election candidate for Labour again this year.

"In 2004 a lot of immigrants were mobilised to vote because the citizenship referendum was due to take place that same year. Now, you just don't know."

Fianna Fáil Councilor John Hannon, who is also running this year, believes there will be a greater immigrant turnout than before because of the increased awareness of voting rights.

"It's inevitable that both will get a number of votes from their groups," says Cllr Hannon of Madondo and Pereppadan's chances. "But I don't believe there will be 'bloc voting'. I think many immigrants realise that it's results that matter, not where the person is from."

"I'd love to see Tendai and Baby do well," says Cllr Corr. "But most people now feel so angry and let down that for any candidate it's going to be a struggle to get them to vote in the first place."

*This article was produced in association with the Forum on Migration and Communications (FOMACS)*