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MIC assembly deliberates on bigger picture of revitalising economy

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THE 52nd MIC general assembly on Saturday will probably be remembered more for its unequivocal show of support for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the National Economic Recovery Plan in overcoming the country's economic problems than for its deliberations on issues facing the Indian community.

MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, speaking in Tamil at the end of his presidential address, pounded out a booming, fiery oratory pledging support, which ended with Dr Mahathir and the packed audience at Sheraton Subang on their feet shouting "Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!".

Samy Vellu was warning the 1,350 delegates, Barisan Nasional component party leaders present and invited guests of attempts by "elements" to colonise the country in other ways.

He said the party believed the key to economic recovery was confidence in one's self, the Government and its leadership and that this was the responsibility of all, including corporate figures, politicians and government servants.

After an elaborate Indian cultural welcome, Dr Mahathir called upon Malaysians to look for new and realistic ways to pump money into the country's economic system.

He said Malaysian women could temporarily pawn their jewellery outside the country and bring the money back here, making a humorous reference to Indian women known for their penchant for gold.

The Prime Minister also said that Malaysians had billions of unmobilised ringgit stashed away and urged them to bring this money into the system.

The assembly was told that Indians had contributed to nation-building before through their representation in the civil service, in a number out of proportion to their population.

Samy Vellu said the MIC would establish a fact-finding mechanism to determine how members could pawn their jewellery abroad and bring home the foreign exchange.

With unfounded rumours of riots rife in the Federal Capital a day earlier, the party showed it was on the ball by drafting a last-minute resolution calling upon the Home Ministry to take stern action against those indulging in rumour-mongering.

The assembly passed 44 amendments to the party's constitution with most of them pertaining to an increased role for the State liaison committees in their dealings with branch and divisional congresses.

While most amendments were quietly accepted, queries were raised on the subject of allowing the divisional youth and women leaders to attend the divisional delegates' conference by virtue of their positions just as the national Youth and Women leaders can attend the party's general assembly for the same reason.

It was asked what would happen if the divisional youth and women leaders offered themselves as candidates given their "immaturity" for senior party positions.

A senior party leader said there was some confusion as Samy Vellu and vice-president Datuk M. Mahalingam, who prepared the amendments, got locked in a heated debate with the delegate asking the question, which only ended when the party president put an end to it.

"Both sides were unaware that there are sufficient by-laws and other conditions that prevent young and inexperienced members from standing for

senior positions. There are checks and balances," the leader said.

Another senior delegate said there was no sign of any dissension and the proceedings were generally smooth.

"The shop is in order and Datuk brooks no nonsense," he said, a fact that became evident when Samy Vellu, at one point, walked out of the assembly apparently angered that delegates did not have with them the printed material handed to them upon registration but had instead "locked them in their cars".

Debate on social issues took a backseat as more time was spent on education issues with the usual comments about lack of finance and places in local institutions of higher learning.

Samy Vellu, as expected, extolled the importance of saving with Koperasi Didik, an education arm of the MIC, so that Indians can get higher educational loans.

The party has racked up millions of ringgit in debts by building the TAFE College in Negri Sembilan and more would have to be spent for the party's proposed university in Kedah and a technology institute in Ipoh.

All this would come to nought if Indians did not start planning now to avail themselves of places there, Samy Vellu said.

Estate workers were also told to prepare themselves for work in other sectors if they continued to get a raw deal despite rising profits due to trading palm oil in the US dollar.

Faced with mounting costs, the general assembly was a one-day affair and it was evident that there was not enough time for more debate on issues facing the community.

The party would have to revert to a two-day general assembly to provide sufficient time for more people to say their piece, especially those party leaders who hold positions in the Government, as the assembly provides an ideal opportunity to explain government efforts in the present economic situation. And Samy Vellu has indicated the party might do just that.

All in all, the party looked at the bigger picture of restoring the economy and called upon the Indian community to play its part while placing its problems on the back burner.

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