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Samy Vellu (News Focus)

BLAZING THE TRAIL AFTER 20 YEARS

By: E.Sivabalan

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 21 (Bernama) -- Blazing the country's premier highways as minister in-charge of infrastructure development, Datuk Seri S.Samy Vellu enters his 20th year as a federal minister tomorrow, just 11 days after becoming MIC's longest-serving president.

Samy Vellu was appointed the then Public Works and Utilities Minister (now Works Minister) on Oct 22, 1979 after taking over the MIC leadership upon the demise of Tan Sri V.Manickavasagam on Oct 12 the same year.

Having earned "Man of the Year" title from the International Road Federation in 1990, Samy Vellu was instrumental in the realisation of the RM6 billion 848km North-South Expressway, the trade mark of his career.

Samy Vellu had played behind-the-scenes role in several national projects such as the state-of-the-art KL International Airport in Sepang and the Penang bridge, one of the longest in Asia.

This was despite having served as Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Minister from 1989 to 95 before returning to his "old turf" - Works Ministry.

As the sole Indian representative in the Cabinet, Samy Vellu is determined "more than ever" to continue voicing the aspirations of his community "without fear or favour" despite criticisms that the MIC had not done much for the Indians.

"I have been entrusted with an important responsibility and I have done my best to voice the aspirations of the Indian community fearlessly," he said in an interview at his residence here today.

"Our task is by no means over," said the feisty 62-year-old leader as he leaned on his armchair to go through MIC's achievements since he took over.

Taking a swipe at his critics for accusing MIC of not delivering much for his community, Samy Vellu said they failed to realise how much the Indians have progressed in the last 20 years or so.

He said problems of the Indians had never been ignored and appropriate actions were taken to seek remedy.

Everyday for the last one month, Samy Vellu would return home after a hectic schedule to "pen" his thoughts and the party's achievements in his notebook computer, at times until the wee hours of the morning.

It would be documented in a book to be distributed to MIC members "so that they can be proud of their achievements," he said.

Immediately after taking over from Manickavasagam, Samy Vellu, as acting party president, started to put the "house (MIC) in order."

After being elected as MIC president in 1981, he proudly announced to his partymen that the MIC was "no more a party of dissension and rift."

Eighteen years later today, Samy Vellu could still afford to say that "as President of the Malaysian Indian Congress, party discipline has been established."

"We have opened the doors to every eligible Indian to voice his legitimate aspirations and exercise their democratic right through the party," he said.

Samy Vellu said since he assumed the post of acting MIC president in 1979, several changes were initiated not only in the party but for the social and economic advancement of the Indians.

Paying tribute to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, he said it was through the Barisan Nasional government that the MIC was able

to bring about considerable changes in the economic and social status of the Indians.

"We are now moving towards the next millennium and we would like to ensure that Malaysian Indians live on par with the other races and march forward towards realising the objectives of a progressive nation," he said.

Sociologist Dr Denison Jayasooria, who is heading MIC's think-tank, Yayasan Strategik Sosial, said Samy Vellu could take the role as "the leader who built the MIC" with a network of 4,084 branches and 510,500 members.

Quoting Samy Vellu's popular phrase that "MIC is the party of soldiers and not only generals", he paid tribute to Samy Vellu for "not only in his role of strengthening the party structure and membership but also creating a new image of pride for the party."

-- BERNAMA

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