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Things can only get better for MIC with its more mature team

M.K. Megan

APART from the much-anticipated party elections, the two-day 54th MIC general assembly, which concluded on Sunday, also saw issues concerning the standard of education in Tamil schools and monthly salary for plantation workers taking centre stage.

The election campaign, it was said, had started even before the nomination day on May 6.

After the nomination day, there was a list with the names of three vice-presidents and 23 central working committee members circulating among the members.

A party source said some long-serving but ineffective CWC members were "asked" not to contest. However, they were adamant and finally they were allowed to.

Party president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu denied having any choice candidates.

But one day before the election, he admitted that vice-presidential candidates - incumbent Datuk G. Palanivel, Tapah MP Datuk S. Veerasingam and party secretary-general Tan Sri Dr K.S. Nijhar - were the type of future leaders he wanted in the party, unofficially endorsing their candidacy. True enough, the three won with ease.

The CWC race, too, saw 22 of the 23 names on the preferred list winning the contest with Datuk S. Balakrishnan as the only "outsider". The casualty from the list was Datuk P. Krishnan, who garnered 277 votes.

Nevertheless, although an "outsider", Balakrishnan immediately pledged his undivided support for the party and president.

"I am a team player. I will not jeopardise the unity and solidarity of the party," he said, after finishing 18th with 955 votes.

This resounding win by the candidates, from the so-called preferred list, only goes to show the strengthening of the president's grip on the party and its members.

It was further enhanced when the party's executive secretary for seven years, Partiban Krishnan, was appointed the secretary-general replacing Nijhar, who was earlier elected vice-president.

Samy Vellu also, for the first time, appointed a woman - Kapar MP Komala Krishnamoorthy - as the information chief replacing Datuk M. Sellathevan.

Former vice-president and CWC member Datuk M. Mahalingam has been given another shot at the helm when he was named the new treasurer-general replacing Tan Sri G. Pasamanickam, who wanted to take a break.

Mahalingam lost the vice-president's post to Datuk M. Muthupalaniappan in the 1997 party election and was not given a seat in the 1999 general election.

Another area where the party is looking at consolidating its position is the proposal to elect its Wanita and Youth chiefs.

"Possibly during the next election we would elect them," said Samy Vellu.

All this, of course, is for the betterment of the party and the members, who have since put their boisterous past behind them.

That is another area the Indians can be proud of. It was one of the most orderly and disciplined assemblies.

Even the debates from the delegates had depth and were constructive, so much so Samy Vellu took note of all the speakers' names and even gave them a standing ovation after the debates ended.

Partiban said he saw the discipline among the members coming.

"The situation has been improving from year to year and it can only get better in future years.

"The delegates were matured in their debate and they came prepared with facts and figures unlike many years ago when they spoke without substance."

He said discipline was at its height and even Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had commented on the members' discipline to Samy Vellu.

Partiban said the resolutions touched on century-old issues like monthly salaries for plantation workers to current issues like being more e-commerce literate.

"We had to repeat some of the resolutions over and over again so that we can get a solution such as the monthly wage issue. Finally, we are seeing the light at the end of the tunnel," he said.

The Government has agreed to pay monthly salaries for plantation workers but was working on the quantum.

The poor achievement of Tamil school students last year, where about 66 per cent of them failed the UPSR examination, had triggered the alarm among the MIC leaders.

Samy Vellu, in his speech, said the poor results had prompted him to raise the issue with the Cabinet so that the Government can intervene immediately to arrest the problem.

Indians also want more share in corporate equity which at present is only 1.5 per cent. They are also asking for more places in local universities.

They are also asking for Thaipusam to be declared a public holiday, failing which the Government should cancel one of the two Saturday off-days and declare Thaipusam an off-day.

Partiban said the elected candidates, the resolutions and high-level maturity among the delegates, only point towards the right direction the party and community was heading. "We can only get better from here on," he said.

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