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MIC-Changes

ACTION TO SPEAK LOUDER AT 55TH MIC GENERAL ASSEMBLY

By: E.Sivabalan

KUALA LUMPUR, May 15 (Bernama) -- The MIC stands at a crossroad, 55 years after its inception with almost half of the period under the firm grip of party president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu.

Tackling poverty, low income, disparity in social status and equity ownership as well as education among the Indian community, which have been the MIC's main struggles since its formation in 1946, are no longer the only issues confronting the party.

The rise of a young Indian middle class who demand greater democratic space and better results from the party has put additional pressure on the MIC to change its path and "colonial" mindset to meet the expectations of this new group.

What will it take. More accountability on the part of the leaders?

"Yes," says the fiesty 65-year-old Samy Vellu. "They (the leaders) will also have to be answerable to the people who have elected them."

It was for this reason that Samy Vellu, who has been at the party's helm for more than 22 years, has proposed amendments to the MIC constitution, among others, to allow the Youth and Wanita wing leaders to be elected instead of being appointed.

The amendments will be tabled at the 55th MIC General Assembly on Saturday in Johor Baharu to be opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"In this way, they (leaders) will be more committed and will work harder," Samy Vellu told Bernama in an interview today.

The proposed amendments will also see an end to the practice of appointing friends and sometimes relatives to posts in branches as all posts in branches will be contested. Presently, only the branch chairmen are elected.

"This is just the beginning of more to come," says a veteran MIC leader, adding that "the president is on a crusade to rejuvenate the party."

On Saturday, when the MIC delegates meet, they will have to come to terms with the harsh realities that without a change in mindset, the party might one day find itself locked out of Parliament and the government.

The maxim "action speaks louder than words" will be the order of the day at the general assembly.

Samy Vellu has set the tone for the meeting by declaring that he was going to ask the delegates to seek "a new meaning, a new role" for the party to initiate changes in the community.

"There has never been so much pressure on us before. Today, things are different, the people expect more and want us to be result-oriented," he said ahead of the two-day assembly.

He said where MIC was lacking, the non-governmental organisations have moved in, thus, creating a feeling that the party was not doing much for the community.

"I have no quarrel with the NGOs. Where we can, we can work together for the betterment of our people," he said.

Samy Vellu, however, said programmes initiated by the MIC over the last two decades have helped uplift the standard of living of the Indian community.

"People are still coming in droves to see us. This is a good sign. This shows they still support us," he said as almost a dozen people waited

outside his house to see him, considered by his aide as a normal scene.

Samy Vellu cautioned that the rise of the middle class and their demand for greater democratic space has new implications on politics today.

He said NGOs and citizen groups were now challenging traditional politics in voicing the concerns of neglected sections of the community.

At the assembly, Samy Vellu, in his presidential address titled "An Agenda for the New Decade" is expected to announce a series of measures to boost the standard of living of the Indians.

His speech will centre on the economic agenda, taking into account the "goodies" for the Indians in the Third Outline Perspective Plan (OPP3) unveiled by Dr Mahathir recently.

It will also touch on social ills among Indian youths, Tamil schools and increasing the number of MIC branches.

These will form part of the new vision and mission of the MIC for the next 10 years.

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