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Incumbent Siva favourite to win second term as Cuepacs president

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DELEGATES to the 22nd Congress of Unions of Employees in the Public and Civil Service (Cuepacs) will elect their new leaders today with the outcome of the last election in 1998 etched vividly in their minds.

Then, the National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP) secretary-general N. Siva Subramaniam (now Datuk) scored a narrow victory over the Malaysian Technical Services Union president Mohd Yusof Harmain for the top post.

However the victory was disputed by some since delegates from the Sabah Medical Services Union were not allowed to vote as they came late to the polling centre at the International Youth Centre in Bandar Tun Razak.

Mohd Yusof's camp claimed that he was robbed of the Sabah votes as the State's delegates were his supporters.

His supporters were also sore with Siva - Cuepacs secretary-general prior to the election - for going for the top post when Yusof was already a deputy president.

But a confident Siva, banking on his support from NUTP - the largest union in Cuepacs with the most number of delegates - went for broke and his decision paid off.

In the process, he created history by becoming the first secretary-general in Cuepacs to become president.

Observers then felt the other reason for his victory was his pact with Abdul Rahman Manan, the present secretary-general.

The pact with Abdul Rahman, they claimed, also helped Siva to get support from the fence sitters.

The fact that Abdul Rahman has been returned unopposed for this election is testimony to the support he enjoys from members.

The 50-year-old Mohamed Yusof, who feels he can still contribute effectively to Cuepacs has decided to make a comeback and fight Siva for the coveted position again. Joining in the fray will be Mardi Employees Union vice-president Ramli Omar, 47. Going by experience, Mohamed Yusof will surely pose a greater challenge to Siva than Ramli.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the Workers' Day celebration organised by Cuepacs on May 1 said he felt comfortable discussing issues affecting civil servants with a team which had a similar approach with the present set of leaders.

Reminiscing, the Prime Minister admitted that he used to be worried when negotiating with Cuepacs leaders back in the 1970s as they were more aggressive in their approach, not like the present team.

(However, this is not necessarily any form of endorsement of the present Cuepacs leadership).

The Government, as the employer, is more comfortable if the Cuepacs leadership consists of those who are open to negotiations and not the gung-ho type.

It is an open secret that civil servants have benefited from the good relationship between Cuepacs and the Government.

The latest was the move by the Government to provide a comprehensive social security package for civil servants which was almost as good as the one provided by Socso for private sector employees.

The benefit here is that civil servants will not have to make monthly contributions as required by Socso for private sector employees. Another contentious issue has been Cuepacs' request for a higher retirement age.

This too was agreed to by the Government in March.

Cuepacs had also asked that this be increased to 60 years - and Dr Mahathir had during a visit to Tenaga Nasional a few months ago agreed that this would eventually be done.

Another feather in Cuepacs' cap is the Government's decision to give civil servants the first and third Saturdays off.

Beginning this year, civil servants were also allowed to take car and computer loans every five years. Housing loans were increased. More allowances, especially for those in the security forces were introduced. Even at the height of the economic crisis, no civil servant was retrenched as compared to the thousands in the private sector.

Neither were there salary cuts. Although the payment of allowances was frozen, this was only temporary.

Cuepacs' request that the pension formula and the New Remuneration System (NRS) be reviewed has also received the Government's attention.

The Public Service Department has almost completed its study on the NRS revision. In the run-up to today's election, all three contenders have almost similar pledges.

Topping the list is a revision in the pension formula, five-day week work, longer maternity leave, the abolishment of the NRS, annual bonus and extending the time-based promotion scheme.

The opposers feel that the present leadership has not been vocal enough in "telling-off" the Government in some instances, such as that requiring them to sign up a good behaviour agreement.

(The present leadership has, however, voiced its displeasure about this).

Although some delegates feel that the 54-year-old Siva should make way for Yusof as he would not be able to complete his term and would have turned 57 by the time the next election is held, this argument was not expected to reduce support for the educationist.

Yusof is also not expected to pose much threat as in the last election although he may get more protest votes this time - from those who still carried the 1998 grudge and from those who are unhappy with the way he deals with the Government.

And with debutant Ramli not expected to pose any threat, Siva is poised to lead Cuepacs for another term.

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