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No alternative to Samy Vellu yet

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DATUK Seri Samy Vellu and I entered Parliament together in 1974 and he remains after a quarter of a century. I believe he can easily win again in the 11th general election. He knows what it takes to retain his Sungai Siput seat.

People who do things under orders are not unhappy. They become grumpy only when they have to perform tasks against their will. Samy Vellu is very adept at making things work.

Samy Vellu has managed both the MIC and his Sungai Siput constituency very well indeed, not an ordinary achievement by any standard.

India, like Indonesia, was the hero of Western subject countries. India's struggles for independence were keenly and sympathetically followed and supported by colonial peoples, including us. In British Malaya, a Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) was founded on the model of the Indian Congress 55 years ago.

I have known three presidents of MIC, Tun V.T. Sambanthan, one of our founding fathers, his successor, Tan Sri V. Manickavasagam and Datuk Seri Samy Vellu, the Indian harbinger in the Government for the last 22 years. Like it or not, he stays on.

The Malaysian Indians have had only one leader, the strong man, since then. The time scale among Malaysian Indians and the Bumiputeras is not dissimilar.

During the last two decades the Malaysian Indians and MIC members and supporters in particular have covered a period of exceptional change, to say the least.

Under Samy Vellu, the MIC has emerged stronger. If the party has become somewhat imperial, it is for the better. I admire Samy Vellu's ability to lead, steer and control his charge.

Of course, as a result, he came to be blamed for many things including the slow development and the alleged continuing poverty of Malaysian Indians. Poverty transcends race, creed and colour. Proportionally, there are as many poor Bumiputeras and Chinese which, as events since Merdeka have demonstrated, are almost beyond the wit of man to cure.

Tun Razak lived simply and died a poor man, relatively speaking, but it was he who inaugurated the affirmative action which was enlarged and vigorously implemented by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. The remarkable progress achieved after three decades was not only stymied but suffered disastrously because of the Asian financial crisis and now it is under threat of further impoverishment by the American and Japanese economic slowdown. Still, we seem to be coping.

Samy Vellu has done his best for the Indians under the circumstances, and one needs only to remember that progress and history are created in part by individuals and events - well beyond the control of Dr Mahathir and Samy Vellu.

But many believe that the 'Samy Vellu Era' in MIC and in government has given Malaysian Indians a better deal, made them stronger and more advanced than anytime before.

The Indian representation in government started in 1952 when the Indian community refused to acknowledge Datuk Sir Clough Thuraisingham, a Sri Lankan Tamil, as their spokesman in the Templer "Cabinet". General Sir Gerald Templer then reshuffled the "Cabinet" and brought in a V.M. Menon as a Member for Posts and Telegraphs.

The Alliance Party (now BN) began with only the Umno and MCA. The MIC joined the Alliance Party just before the only general election ever held in British Malaya in July 1955.

The Indians must not make this fatal political mistake: there is no substitute for an Indian party within the ruling coalition. There are not many non-governmental organisations (NGOs), many of which are run like private companies, that can represent them.

In any case, if they are NGOs, their business is not to be spokesmen for Indians, rather for all Malaysians. The Government will never accept them as representatives of Indians even if they are Indian-based and led.

They can articulate and shout but it will be the MIC which will be listened to and deliver. The MIC will be relevant for as long as political parties are communally-based which is going to be the case for a long time to come.

Unity must arise from the natural desire of the peoples themselves. There is that desire but no political will to enhance it! We cannot achieve unity if everything the Government wants to do is opposed on the ground of communal long-term interests. When one group only wants everything and gives out nothing, bangsa Malaysia is just wishful thinking.

For good or worse, the MIC is the only well-tested political instrument through which Malaysian Indians can play a meaningful role in 21st century Malaysia. One does not throw goodwill and a channel built over 55 years, does one?

The MIC must and will develop a new image as it acquires more power and influence. That can only happen if its political strength remains. Better still, if the party's prestige among the Indians is further enhanced.

The best bet for all races is to work together as Malaysians. No one race can progress in isolation without without building resentment that can become a potent ingredient for instability.

I agree absolutely with Samy Vellu that the Indians, on the whole, are not poor. Of course, they are if one focuses only among the 30 per cent Indian estate workers. The Bumiputeras are deprived if one zeroes in on the squatters. Even the Chinese are poor, many of them, in the new villages.

Samy Vellu stated that the Indians' share of the National Wealth amounted to some RM16 billion. Obviously, he has not included Ananda Krishnan's RM10.7 billion, which makes him the second richest man in the nation, and that of many other super-rich Indians.

The Indians have done well under Samy Vellu's leadership and more will come through. The Indians have done better in the medical and legal professions than the Bumiputeras as they have in the thriving private sector education and several other fields.

One thing which is easily overlooked, as is the case, is the fact that under Samy Vellu MIC has become more egalitarian. Which is in keeping with the times.

The Bumiputeras and Indians face the same future. The Chinese economic strength is becoming increasingly awesome. Neither, nor even together, can they withstand the Chinese economic typhoon. The only sane and smart thing for them to do is to work with the Chinese. You have been fooled if you believe otherwise. This is no time for narrow-minded communal fanaticism.

In four years' time, there will be 1.78 million Malaysian Indians. Most will have Indian names for they cannot (which is understandable) flee from the crippling bonds of their ethnicity. To non-Malaysians they might even be mistaken as Indian nationals, but they are loyal Malaysians.

Malaysian Indians must put the past in its place and open the doors to the future. Let no past hang-ups hobble them; they should look forward

with confidence at what a globalised economy has to offer us.

The challenge facing MIC is not only to develop new talent and take pride in what the Indian community has achieved; it is also to open itself to the contention of ideas and interests within the Indian community, wedded to the controlled and managed pluralism which is MIC's strength.

Samy Vellu's quintessence, benevolence and towering, no-nonsense leadership, can withstand any challenge.

Samy Vellu appears to me a good student of Napoleon who said, "A leader is a dealer of hope". If I may add, in Samy Vellu's case, he is also a contributor and deliverer.

Though he doesn't appear to be so, Samy Vellu is a mite sensitive. The secret of his success is not to command what he cannot enforce.

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