

17 MAY 2002

MIC-Assembly

MIC GENERAL ASSEMBLY WITH A DIFFERENCE ON THE CARDS

By: S. Retnanathan

KUALA LUMPUR, May 17 (Bernama) -- The two-day MIC General Assembly, to be held at the Selangor State Secretariat Building, beginning tomorrow will be somewhat different from previous ones.

Apart from being different, the assembly is expected to make a landmark amendment to the party constitution to allow any of the 4,500 branch chairmen to take on the MIC president.

The 56th edition of the assembly will not start with the opening address of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as had been the practice before but with the welcome speech of party secretary-general S. Sothinathan.

It will then proceed to seek approval from the 1,500 delegates, who are divisional leaders, to amend Section 58 of the MIC Constitution, to allow the party president to be challenged by branch chairmen.

This provision requires aspirants to secure at least 50 nominations (one nomination must be signed by six branch chairmen) and they must have been a party member for 10 years and more.

The amendment, to be tabled by MIC Constitution Amendment Committee Head Tan Sri M. Mahalingam, is expected to be passed but not without being debated by delegates.

This is because division leaders see the amendment as a threat to the power they wield now as at present they have absolute power in electing national leaders.

"With the amendment, they (division leaders) stand to lose out in picking the president...they have been some murmurs among them but I don't think they will come up and speak against it totally. They will, nevertheless, speak about it for sure," said a MIC leader who declined to be named.

The second order of the first day of the assembly will be the tabling of 11 resolutions which, among others, will call on the government and the powers that be to look into various aspects involving Indians in the country.

The resolutions will touch on increasing Indian equity ownership in the country's economic pie, urging the government to provide more job opportunities for Indians in the public sector, a permanent solution to fixed wages for estate workers, more housing for low-income families, tackling social ills and eradication of poverty among the Indian community.

Resolutions are also expected to accord special attention to the level of education among Indians and the latest issue of the slide in Indian students' intake into public universities.

Although some of the resolutions have been adopted in previous years, a debate on them is inevitable, said a party division head.

There is also the possibility of an emergency resolution being tabled and if it is brought up, the emergency resolution is expected to touch on the use of the merit-based system for the intake of students to government universities.

On the second day, the delegates will hear Dr Mahathir, who will officially open the assembly. The party has to defer opening of the assembly to the second day to accommodate Dr Mahathir, who is fresh from his three-day working visit to the United States.

Party president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu will then proceed to deliver his presidential address which is expected to dwell on education,

globalisation, knowledge-based economy, estate workers, social problems besetting the urban poor of the Indian community, social ills among Indians, entrepreneurial and business opportunities.

The two speeches will take up half of Sunday and after lunch, the delegates will debate on the presidential address.

Although this year's assembly does not seem to differ much from its usual business, it will make history by being the assembly that gave 4,500 branch chairmen the power to pick their president.

-- BERNAMA

SR ZS TS