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MIC-Wrapup

IMAGE CHANGE AND CWC ELECTION HOG LIMELIGHT AT MIC ASSEMBLY

KUALA LUMPUR, May 12 (Bernama) -- Changing the image of Malaysian Indians and a breakthrough by a woman in getting elected to the party's Central Working Committee (CWC) took centre stage at the two-day 57th MIC annual general assembly which ended here yesterday.

Party president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu set the tempo in his presidential address when he told the more than 5,000 party members present that the community needed to change its identity and improve its image to be on par with other races in the country.

He said the community needed to change its mindset and discard its "estate and uneducated image" which was a stigma attached to the community.

The Works Minister wanted a vibrant, hardworking, self-reliant and educated community, which he termed as traits of the new Malaysian Indian.

The 1,497 delegates were not only supportive of the idea but were also keen to push for this as was evident from the debate that ensued at the assembly, which was opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Saturday.

"They were very receptive. They were also very keen to know how we can achieve this new image. I am happy with the response they have given to this effort," the party supremo told reporters at the end of the assembly yesterday.

Observers at the assembly felt that the president's push for this new image was timely and must be implemented if Malaysian Indians wanted to be taken seriously by the government.

"If we are known as a rubber tapper or a less educated community, then nobody is going to take us seriously. We should be known as professionals who mean what we say. Only then can we make requests to the powers that be for the betterment of the community," said an observer.

While the new image of the community is a long-term goal of the party, the assembly also witnessed a "rebel" taking on the president's men and winning a seat on the party's highest decision-making body.

G. Vimalahthavi, contesting for one of the 23 available seats on the CWC, came in a credible 18th among the 33 contestants, who were all well-known personalities within the party. She polled slightly more than 1,000 votes.

Soon after the nominations for party top positions on May 1, Samy Vellu announced the official list of 23 CWC members he wanted and Vimalahthavi was not one of them. She was even dismissed by many as a non-contender.

The 23 on the presidential list were taken on a nationwide tour by Samy Vellu to introduce them to the delegates.

Although other contestants were allowed to tag along with them, they were not formally introduced by Samy Vellu with some left standing outside the venue of the meetings, only to hand out pamphlets promoting themselves.

Nobody in the party gave the 50-year-old gutsy Vimalahthavi, the Kelana Jaya MIC branch head, a chance in the contest, more so as she did not hold any position in the party's Wanita wing.

She deposed the more prominent Datuk M. Sundram of Negeri Sembilan from the president's list. All the other president's men made it to the CWC.

At the nominations, the deputy president's post was won unopposed by Datuk S. Subramaniam, the Deputy Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister, while the three vice-presidential positions went to Datuk S. Veerasingham, Datuk G. Palanivel and Tan Sri K.S. Nijhar, all unopposed.

Datuk V.K.K. Teagarajan, textile tycoon and 12-year CWC member, had caused a scar when he his nomination to contest the position, only to withdraw it seven hours later.

This he did after some "persuasion" by Samy Vellu. Teagarajan was, however, appointed party information chief and a CWC member by Samy Vellu at the end of the assembly yesterday. The party president is allowed by the MIC constitution to appoint five CWC members to join the 23 elected ones.

Party insiders say that the position given to Teagarajan was a trade-off, promised him after he agreed to pull out of the veep race but this could not be confirmed.

"If he (Teagarajan) had gone for the vice-presidential race, he would have posed a very serious threat to Nijhar. The president had to safeguard the unity in the party. Nijhar is the representative of the North Indian community and is also important to the party," said a delegate.

While party unity was important, some delegates felt that the president should have allowed a free-for-all contest as this would enable hardworking and sincere leaders to fill party positions instead of some leaders who "just warm their chairs".

"When you stop someone from contesting and give him a post, that person losses credibility, not only among his supporters but also the respect of the delegates. Teagarajan will not be taken seriously if he intends to contest any post in the party in the future. He could change his mind anytime," said a delegate.

Some delegates felt that Samy Vellu should not meddle in the elections for CWC positions as this should be left to the sole wisdom of the grassroot leaders who see the party's upper echelon from a different viewpoint.

A party leader who declined to be named said grassroot leaders wanted to see national leaders who can sit with them and have a discussion, no matter how trivial the issue. They do not want leaders who come in their flashy cars just because the president is attending a function and disappear soon after.

"The mistake is trying to force some leaders down the throats of these branch and division leaders. Democracy in the MIC must not only be seen and practised but it should be done in a fair and just manner for the benefit of all," said another delegate.

-- BERNAMA

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