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Samy-MIC

SAMY VELLU TIGHTENS GRIP ON MIC

A news analysis By S. Retnanathan

KUALA LUMPUR, May 7 (Bernama) -- MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu has further tightened his grip on the largest Indian-based political party in the country as evident from the run-up to the party's leadership election at the 57th General Assembly to be held at the Putra World Trade Centre on Saturday.

The election, which was to have seen contests for all top positions in the party except for the president's post, will now be held without much sizzle, thanks to the ability of the 67-year-old veteran leader's political manoeuvres and persuasive skills.

The assembly will be opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and attended by his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

As a result of his ability to persuade MIC top leaders to compromise their political ambitions, the assembly will only see contest for the 23 Central Working Committee (CWC) seats while other top party positions have been won uncontested.

On the nomination day for top party positions on May 1, there was some excitement when businessman Datuk V.K.K. Teagarajan, a CWC member for 12 years, filed his nomination for the vice-presidency despite the party supremo's endorsement of the three incumbent vice-presidents to be retained in their posts.

The incumbents are National Unity and Social Development Ministry Parliamentary Secretary Datuk S. Veerasingham, Deputy Minister of Rural Development Datuk G. Palanivel and Subang MP Tan Sri Dr K.S. Nijhar.

However, after much political haggling, Teagarajan, barely seven hours after filing his nomination, announced his withdrawal from the race in front of Samy Vellu at the Federal Territory MIC Convention.

It was rumoured in the MIC leadership circle that the textile tycoon would be reappointed to the party's decision-making CWC and might even be given a MIC ticket to stand in the coming general election.

Samy Vellu's deputy, Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Deputy Minister, Datuk S. Subramaniam, retained his post unopposed on May 1, while Samy Vellu created history when he was elected president for an unprecedented ninth consecutive term on March 8, coinciding with his 67th birthday.

Now the only contest to look forward to will be the 23 CWC posts to which 33 people have joined the fray. Thirty-seven party leaders submitted their nominations but four have since withdrawn from the contest with three days to go for polling.

The four who pulled out are Datuk S. Parasuraman and A. Arumugam, both from Kedah, S. Sellakrishnan of Negeri Sembilan and Pahang's S. Ganeson.

Party insiders feel there will be a few more hoisting the white flag at the last minute.

Samy Vellu, in keeping with the past tradition during party elections, has come out with a "president's list" for the CWC seats and has organised roadshows to introduce "his camp" to the 1,457 delegates.

"Well, the response from the delegates has been good. I've introduced them and the delegates seemed happy," Samy Vellu said recently when asked on the response received by his team.

One of the Works Minister's aides said the MIC president needed team players so that there would be no internal bickerings in the party.

"MIC needs leaders who can work as a team in achieving the party's

immediate goals like the setting up of the Asian Institute of Medicine, Science and Technology (AMIST) and this is what the president wants," said the aide.

While picking a team was good for the party and the leadership, one party insider pointed out that it deprived potential leaders from taking over from some leaders who have been serving in their posts for over 10 years.

"If Samy Vellu had been in Teagarajan's position, would he have done what Teagarajan did? I don't think so. He would have gone ahead and contested. We don't see that kind of leaders anymore.

"When Samy Vellu was up and coming in the party, he fought his way up. There was no easy path for him. So, if there is any leader who wants a post, he must be prepared to fight it out all the way and not expect positions on a silver platter," said a retired MIC veteran, who declined to be named.

He said the present breed of MIC leaders are not political-savvy because many do not have strong political ambitions and fighting ability as exhibited by Samy Vellu in his early days in the MIC.

It must also be noted that the team system practised by Samy Vellu every three years the party holds its election, also blunts the search for new talents.

"When a leader is picked by the president, lesser known ones become virtually invisible because they do not get a chance to be seen or heard. So, they are left in their positions as branch or division chairmen throughout their political career," said a two-term CWC member.

Samy Vellu, in exhibiting his political maturity, did not just endorse the leaders he thought had the ability to serve the party effectively for the next three years but also gave them a subtle warning.

When asked recently if the party had picked its candidates for the coming general election he said: "Yes, the candidates have been picked, but I will announce their names at the appropriate time after receiving the endorsement from the Prime Minister. There will be a lot of changes."

MIC currently has seven parliamentary and 13 state seats and the party is expected to be given one additional parliamentary and one state seat following the redelineation of electoral boundaries.

Twenty-five new parliamentary constituencies and 63 state assembly seats have been created under the redelineation exercise. The Bill for the creation of the seats was passed by the Dewan Rakyat on April 8.

By saying that "there would be a lot of changes", Samy Vellu had put all leaders on their toes.

Existing MIC members of parliament and state assemblymen would be wondering if they would be picked to contest in the next general election while those, who missed out the last time, would be thinking if this election would provide them the much-awaited opportunity.

MIC is one party which does not guarantee a parliament or a state seat for those holding party positions.

"He (Samy Vellu) is not that lame. He knows the game he plays and he plays it very well. For now, we can't see anyone taking over from him in the near future.

"Furthermore, putting in place leaders aligned to him only shows one thing,

-- Samy Vellu is not about to vacate his seat soon," said a party veteran.

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