

MIC candidates jostle to be Chosen One
Malaysiakini.com
April 11, 2007
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Although 39-year-old lawyer S Murugesan looks like the favourite to be MIC's candidate for the Ijok by-election slated to be held on April 28, several party leaders said other frontrunners should not be discounted just yet.

"The party still has got time to decide on its candidate. We have finalised a list of names but we are still looking at the list," a senior party leader who wished to remain anonymous told malaysiakini today.

This party leader's decision to go unnamed is understandable as all decisions emanating from the party - not just for this by-election - must come solely from party president S Samy Vellu.

The Election Commission today announced that nomination for the state by-election will be held on April 19, a Thursday with polling day on April 28, a Saturday.

The seat fell vacant following the sudden death of MIC assemblyman K Sivalingam of a heart attack last Wednesday in Chennai, India.

Apart from Murugesan, other names being considered by the party supremo include MIC central working committee member T Mohan and Shah Alam city councillor S Murugavellu, a party source said.

"I must admit that Murugesan (also CWC member) and Mohan do look like standing a better chance than the rest. And then we also have Murugavellu," the senior party leader added.

Another state-level leader revealed that several MIC divisions in Selangor had strongly lobbied for Murugavellu to get the 'A-okay'. At least one division in Selangor, meanwhile, had put forward Kuala Selangor MIC Division chief P Thirumoorthy's name for consideration.

However, top level Selangor leaders are favouring fresh-faced Murugesan to carry on MIC's presence in Ijok.

Popular candidate

The state leader told malaysiakini when contacted today that MIC Selangor chief and party deputy president G Palanivel wanted Murugesan to contest in Ijok. Palanivel was not available for comment when contacted.

Both Murugesan and Murugavellu come from the same Shah Alam division which was helmed by Sivalingam. While Murugesan is the division's Youth chief, Murugavellu is the division's vice-chairman.

"Having a candidate from the same division as Sivalingam would be good to continue the work started here," said S Kanesan, a MIC Shah Alam member.

Murugesan seems to have taken the lead in the race to be chosen one due to both his

popularity in the Indian community and among party members.

'Don't forget his comeback into the MIC leadership when most thought he was on his way out,' said the state leader, adding that he, too, preferred the Klang-born Murugesan as the candidate.

The leader was referring to a fallout between Murugesan and MIC Youth chief SA Vigneswaran last year which saw the former resigning his MIC Youth Secretary's post.

The lawyer, married with three children, then went on to contest for his CWC post in the party polls last year, managing to get elected to the party's highest decision-making body.

"And he is also hosting a programme on Astro on legal matters. He is in the view of the community. They know him. They have heard him and seen him on television. He stands a good chance of winning handsomely in Ijok," said the state leader.

To date, it would be safe to say that as far as Selangor MIC is concerned, the top choice for Ijok is definitely Murugesan, with Murugavellu being the standby candidate.

Grassroots worker

However, leaders from outside Selangor are of the opinion that Mohan enjoys the same sort of popularity in the community that Murugesan does.

"In fact, I think he is better known at the grassroots level," said a party insider.

Mohan, 34, is known for his work on the ground and many party leaders believe he should be rewarded by being given the Ijok seat.

"I can tell you that Samy Vellu will lean more towards Mohan but as Palanivel wants Murugesan, Samy Vellu might just agree so that there is no perception of a rift between the two top leaders," the insider observed.

In the midst of this, another surprise name is being bandied about among the party hierarchy for the seat.

Several party sources and prominent Tamil journalists told malaysiakini that MIC Information chief and Federal Territory MIC chief M Saravanan looks set to be a last-minute entrant into the race.

"It's understandable why he is being mentioned. Firstly, he is a Samy Vellu loyalist. The president might want one of his boys in Selangor to keep a check on the others," said a longtime MIC observer.

The Tamil media has been reporting for some time now that Samy Vellu and Palanivel are not on the best of terms. Samy Vellu is also said to be at loggerheads with his Youth leader Vigneswaran, who has a strong following in Selangor.

"So don't be surprised if at the end of the day it is not Murugesan who is named as the MIC candidate. It is still an open race," he said.

PKR's choice

In another development, it was reported today that MIC had already submitted a list of names for Ijok to Selangor Menteri Besar Dr Mohd Khir Toyo. The final decision will be made by Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Khir also confirmed that he would not entertain a request by the Kuala Selangor Umno division for the seat to be given to Umno.

In the opposition camp, Parti Keadilan Rakyat looks set to contest the seat. Two names from the party are being mentioned - party treasurer Khalid Ibrahim and businessman KS Nallakaruppan. The former is more likely than not to be the chosen candidate.

The electoral roll for Ijok comprises 12,335 voters, of which Malay voters make up 51.04 percent, Indians 28.16 percent and Chinese 20.59 percent.

Sivalingam won the seat for a third term when he defeated Keadilan's Abdul Rahman Moharam with a 1,649-vote majority in the last general election in 2004.

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