

Solomon the wild card in MTUC sec-gen race
Malaysiakini.com
Disember 24, 2010

There is no post more coveted in the 61-plus years old Malaysian Trades Union Congress than that of secretary-general - and with three unionists eyeing the post in the Dec 29 polls, the race is drawing heat.

The talk is what effect wild card contender J Solomon, the general secretary of the National Union of Bank Employees, will have on the polls that is largely seen as a battle between the team aligned to incumbent president Syed Shahir Syed Mohamud and those endorsed by outgoing secretary-general G Rajasekaran.

Solomon (left), who received just one nomination, is expected to spoil the chances of Syed Shahir's running mate, PKR Kuala Langat MP Abdullah Sani Abdul Hamid, who has been nominated by 13 unions.

This is Abdullah Sani's second bid for the post, which is also coveted by Rajasekaran's deputy and chosen candidate Abdul Halim Mansor of the National Union of Petroleum and Chemical Industry Workers, who received 19 nominations.

"We believe that our traditional supporters make up about half of the 500-plus voters. Solomon and Abdullah Sani used to be from the same camp, so their supporters would be split between them," said Rajasekaran.

Rajasekaran is also endorsing Mohd Khalid Atan of the Timber Employees Union for the post of MTUC president against Syed Shahir, who is also Selangor PKR deputy chief, with whom the outgoing secretary-general is said to have had difficulties working with.

For what it is worth, both Abdullah Sani of the Club Employees Union and Solomon have been magnanimous to each other, with both saying that it is the right of either party to contest since both have been nominated.

"The question of friendship and alignment is a secondary matter. I feel that the polls are livelier this time around and I welcome this as each of us are coming out with our own agenda," Abdullah Sani said.

For Abdullah Sani, the fact that he lost to veteran Rajasekaran by only four votes in his first try in 2007 is indicative of his strength, while Solomon believes that his track record at NUBE is proof enough.

'PKR man will only toe party line'

Solomon's experience seems to have got him into the good books of Rajasekaran, who said he had "nothing against" the former but could not support him as he was counting on his deputy Halim to take over.

However, Rajasekaran (right) could not say the same about Abdullah Sani, whom he felt was far too inexperienced to helm the most important seat in the umbrella body, despite being active in trade unions since 1984.

More than that, Rajasekaran is going all out to endorse a line-up against Syed Shahir-Abdullah Sani team because of their political affiliations.

While he did not want to reveal details, the secretary-general since 1994 said his experience thus far persuaded him to believe that having PKR strongmen in MTUC's top two posts would compromise the congress on the decisions it makes.

"In any case, the federal government is already paying very little attention to us, and I would rather that we are not seen as the enemy," he added.

Factionalism within congress 'rife'

The bitter experience of factionalism when helming the post alongside Syed Shahir as president also appears to be one of the reasons for Rajasekaran taking up this role as 'pseudo-spiritual leader'.

"I am doing this because I believe MTUC is not as strong as it could be because of factionalism...Yes, putting up a team also contributes to this, but we have no choice. The other side has set up its team, so we need to be organised to face them.

"The battle lines have been drawn for this election, but I chose to endorse (the candidates selected) because I believe that there is a greater chance of solidarity with this lot.

"If Syed Shahir (left) retains his post and Halim wins as secretary-general, there could still be factionalism, but I hope Syed Shahrir has learnt some lessons from his weak points," he said, although doubting the incumbent's ability to close ranks.

Solomon, too, agreed that the congress had not been functioning as well as it should due to disagreements among its leaders.

But for Abdullah Sani, factionalism is a non-issue if office holders adhere to the congress constitution and make consensus-based decisions.

"There should not be a split because of a difference of opinion over some matters, since our core objective is the same - to defend workers' rights. We will not be weakened, only our 'coverage' may not be as wide due to these divergent opinions.

"But these are just private principles, and all decisions should be made by procedure," he said, adding that there have been cases before where consensus was not sought.

No manifesto for Rajasekaran's team

Of the three candidates for secretary-general, only Solomon has released his manifesto, with Abdullah Sani expected to release his by Monday.

Halim is not coming out with a manifesto, as will be the case with all the other candidates backed by Rajasekaran, who the veteran leader expects to garner votes based on how well the delegates "view their trustworthiness when they speak on Dec 28".

Abdullah Sani (right) is expected to emphasise on 'legalised human trafficking' through permits issued by the home ministry to selected agents - an issue that MTUC has pursued, but has not gone very far with.

Solomon's 10-point manifesto includes the push for a minimum wage of RM1,500 plus RM300 cost of living allowance, a pension fund for private sector employees, a labour study research institute and the repealing of the minister's discretionary powers under the labour laws.

Though he may be a crucial player, Solomon, who has faced allegations of being too 'government friendly' for putting up banners to declare NUBE's support for the prime minister, believes that he is fighting as an underdog.

"I put up those banners because I support Najib (Abdul Razak)'s 1Malaysia, and there's nothing wrong with that, as we will still go against policies harmful to our members.

"People with no track record will not be able to give any assurance of this, and I have a proven track record," Solomon added.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.

Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/151634>