

MIC may lose up to five seats
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K Kabilan

For three consecutive general elections, MIC has an almost perfect record in winning the seats it has contested. It may be handed a beating, by its standards, come Saturday.

mic seats for 2008 general electionAs in 2004, the Indian-based party will contest nine parliament and 19 state seats, but it can no longer take the community's support for granted.

Across the country, Indian Malaysians have shown their anger at MIC, especially at its veteran president S Samy Vellu, for the party's failure to uplift the community's economic and social status since Independence.

Even worse, they have openly challenged Samy Vellu to admit his failures and step down immediately. He, though, has put on a brave face, telling anyone who is prepared to listen that only the MIC can safeguard the community's interests.

He obviously doesn't believe in gloom and doom, insisting that the 14 new faces being introduced as candidates will win.

However, the parliamentary seats of Kota Raja, Teluk Kemang and Sungai Siput look shaky at the moment, with Kapar ripe for an upset.

The state seats of Bukit Selambau, Lunas, Prai and Bagan Dalam seem almost out of MIC's grasp, and the prognosis is critical in Seri Andalas and Batu Caves.

MIC seems to be on the way to retain all the other state seats, especially those in Johor, Pahang and Malacca.

The first signs of trouble for MIC appeared in Penang and Kedah last October, when Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) leaders went on a nationwide tour lambasting the demolition of Hindu temples.

Thousands of Indians attended their road shows in parts of Kedah and Penang. A MIC state representative was booed vehemently when he eulogised the work of Samy Vellu and his party.

Further anger was provoked by the forcible dispersal of the Hindraf rally on Nov 25. A different form of dissent was triggered against the MIC when Hindraf leaders were detained under the ISA and the movement was labelled as extremists.

Last week, Samy Vellu was heckled and mobbed in Kulim, while complaints have emerged about several MIC candidates' conduct.

Red alert: state seats

In Kedah, MIC is contesting the Bukit Selambau and Lunas state seats, which have a substantially high number of Indian voters - 29.5 percent (or about 9,000 voters) in Bukit

Selambau and 22.5 percent (about 6,600 voters) in Lunas.

In 2004, the margin of victory was 7,695 in Bukit Selambau and 4,299 in Lunas, but it will be difficult for the MIC to repeat its success this time around.

mic seats in dangerIt may find solace in the fact that it is facing an Independent in Bukit Selambau, and thus may well pull through by moving into high gear over the final days of campaigning.

In Penang, Indian sentiments are against the MIC, which is also wracked by internal bickering. But the deciding factor could be that its candidates are facing fellow Indians in the Bagan Dalam and Prai state seats, thereby giving the voters in the community a real choice in the communal stakes.

Both seats also have a high number of Indian voters - 22.3 percent (about 3,900 voters: 2004 majority 1,967) in Bagan Dalam and a whopping 35.8 percent (5,050 voters: 2004 majority 583) in Prai.

Prai looks dead set to be gone, especially when the DAP candidate P Ramasamy has been well-received by voters. There is a local Independent candidate to contend with as well.

MIC is also struggling to convince voters in Batu Caves and Seri Andalas, in Selangor, to retain its candidates as state representatives.

In Batu Caves, MIC's T Mohan is a new face with ample grassroots work behind him. However his candidacy is not welcomed by the local MIC divisions as he is an outsider.

More importantly, it is an open secret that Malay voters were not happy with the incumbent who was dropped. The PKR's Malay candidate and another Malay Independent will hope to take advantage of this. Mohan, though, expects to pull through.

In Seri Andalas, incumbent A Kamala Ganapathy faces PKR strongman A Xavier Jeyakumar in a straight fight. There are about 12,800 Indian voters (33 percent), all affected by the Hindraf factor.

If Jeyakumar can capitalise on their sentiments, he is assured of their votes but he must be mindful that he is up against an incumbent who had the support of other races as well in 2004. This will be a close fight but the MIC should win it.

A surprise result is being predicted in Sungkai in Perak where MIC vice-president S Veerasingam takes on DAP's A Sivanesan, a Hindraf lawyer.

However, Veerasingam is a known face with a good track record. He is expected to win, but Sivanesan could take most of the 3,000-odd Indian votes.

Big shots who could fall

Five of the parliamentary seats that MIC is contesting look like they are in the bag.

These are Hulu Selangor (deputy president G Palanivel), Tapah (new face M Saravanan), Cameron Highlands, (incumbent SK Devamany), Segamat (secretary-general and incumbent Dr S Subramaniam) and Subang (newcomer S Murugesan).

Kapar looks most vulnerable at the moment where incumbent P Komala Devi, who heads the MIC women's wing, faces a straight fight with PKR's S Manikavasagam.

kapar parliamentary seat contest people Once again the Hindraf factor will have to be watched. Manikavasagam is a Hindraf coordinator and became the face of the movement after the arrest of key leaders under the ISA last December.

Indians make up about 15,000 of the 112,224 voters in Kapar. Manikavasagam's camp is quietly confident of winning enough popular support to breach the 14,588-vote majority which Komala obtained in 2004.

Komala's walkabouts in the constituency have been disastrous in the Indian areas, whereas voters have embraced Manikavasagam as one of their own. If this trend continues, Komala looks set to lose her seat.

Similarly in Kota Raja, incumbent SA Vigneswaran, the MIC Youth chief, is coming up against voters who want answers for the community's plight.

He takes on Dr Siti Mariah Mahmud of PAS in a straight fight. She has had greater success among Indian voters, many of whom have openly professed support.

Vigneswaran, who won with an emphatic majority of 8,239 in 2004, is expected to win, albeit with a reduced majority.

sothinathan and MIC vice-president S Sothinathan may also be looking at defeat in Teluk Kemang, not only because of Hindraf, but because of increasing anger among Malay voters. There are some 24,000 Malay voters (40.6 percent) and 13,300 Indian voters (22.2 percent).

PKR strongman Kamarul Baharin Abbas will hope to capitalise on the situation, while an Independent could well split the votes. It will be a close call, but Sothinathan had a massive 17,777 majority in 2004 and, with sufficient support from Umno, he should retain his seat.

Battle for Sungai Siput

Samy Vellu has held the seat since 1974, but his ability to command the Indian vote has never been so low as at present.

samy vellu penang campaign 260208 discomfort He attracts unwanted attention everywhere he goes. He has been mobbed by angry crowds in Selangor, Penang, Kedah and Perak over the past three weeks.

But is this likely to unseat him in Sungai Siput? His challenger Dr D Jeyakumar has been edging closer with every election and has built up grassroots support, especially among the Indians.

If Indians desert him, however, Samy Vellu will count on the votes of other races - and not for the first time either. In 2004, he readily conceded their role and expressed gratitude to them for the majority of 10,235 votes.

There are 18,816 Chinese voters, 16,991 Malay voters and about 10,000 Indian voters in

Sungai Siput. The battle is raging to capture their hearts and votes.

Samy Vellu may well emerge victor, but bloodied and with his reputation in tatters.

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