

MIC - A new era begins
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On March 8, MIC president S Samy Vellu turned 72. It was also the day the curtain fell on his political era. MCPX

umno bn leaders election meeting 140208 samy velluAfter nearly three decades in power, the politician who commanded a cult-like following in his party was defeated in the fortress where he reigned for nine terms.

It was a cleansing of MIC's top echelon. The casualties included deputy president G Palanivel, vice-president S Sothinathan, Youth chief S A Vigneswaran and Women's wing chief P Komala Devi.

The party only managed to retain three out of nine parliamentary seats and six out of 19 state seats. The message was loud and clear.

According to Malaysian Indian Business Association (Miba) president P Sivakumar, this could signal the birth of a new era for MIC.

But firstly, he said, the party must conduct an in-depth analysis to determine the reasons behind its crushing defeat.

"When you fall, you must pick yourself up and look at the reasons as to why you fell so that you do not fall again," he told Malaysiakini yesterday.

Likening the damage inflicted on MIC to the destruction brought about by the Sept 11 terror attacks, he said it also served as a lesson for the younger generation of leaders.

The factors

Sivakumar said the first, and most important, factor which contributed to the devastation of MIC was the advent of the Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) and the wave of discontent it created.

On Nov 25 last year, some 30,000 disgruntled Indians took the streets to vent their frustration against the government and MIC, namely its president.

hindraf march of roses parliament 160208 t shirts"These were not the voices of a few hundred, but tens of thousands of people. Many organisations also came out to help MIC and the government on this issue, but no immediate attention was given, except for some assurances," he said.

MIC - to the chagrin of the community - had also joined the government in condemning the Hindraf movement whose five key leaders are now held under the Internal Security Act (ISA).

Another factor, Sivakumar said, was the silencing and removing of dissenting voices in MIC, including Samy Vellu's former estranged deputy S Subramaniam.

"Thousands of Subramaniam's supporters were left in the lurch and they also expressed their anger in this polls," he noted.

Thirdly, the Miba president pointed out that the manifestos of the opposition parties, which stressed on equality, were also well received by the Indians.

"The Indian community is not questioning the special rights and the privileges accorded to the Malays, but just want their due rights and equal opportunities as citizens of this country," he said.

The future

On the future of MIC, Sivakumar said the most important issue to address now was unity in the party.

"MIC must look into the possibility of bringing those on the outside back into the fold in order to strengthen the party," he added.

Asked if this included Subramaniam, he responded: "Why not? He has a large following and he was the longest serving deputy president."

Subramaniam, whose ties with Samy Vellu had been strained for years, was defeated in the 2006 party polls by Palanivel, who was endorsed by the president.

Meanwhile, Sivakumar also stressed on the importance of MIC to craft a new image for itself.

"The party must break free from the image of violence and thuggery. It must become a party which is willing to accept constructive criticisms and feedback

"A conducive environment must be created to attract the thousands of well-educated and talented Indians in the community who prefer to speak freely about issues," he said.

"We need a large number of dynamic young minds to chart the future course of the party. More bureaus must be set up to look into the critical issues facing the community instead of leaving it in the hands of one or two think-tanks," he added.

Still relevant

Sivakumar also reminded MIC leaders that the younger generation of Indians are more aware of their rights.

In view of this, he said the party must create a leadership which blends the experience of the veterans with the dynamism and talents of the young.

On that note, the Miba president also stressed that MIC was still a relevant political force in the country.

"BN (Barisan Nasional) is still ruling the country, so MIC is still relevant. We must not forget that the founding fathers had entered into a social contract between MIC, Umno and MCA.

MIC is still a good platform for the Indian community," he said.

Sivakumar advised the younger leaders in MIC to pay heed to the valuable lessons from this tragic episode for the party.

"Do not cull talents because of rivalry. MIC is a powerful party, talents must be nurtured and not expunged," he said, adding that the ball was now in the president's court.

mic candidates announcement 220208 happy" This is a new beginning for MIC. Samy Vellu's next step is crucial," he stressed.

Agreeing with Sivakumar, a party observer said the younger leaders must also realise that they cannot afford to ignore the voice and sentiments of the people.

"Samy Vellu had given the kiss of life to the political careers of the leaders in MIC and now he has taken it away. These leaders have learned, albeit bitterly, the true meaning of democracy," he said.

"From the ruins of yesterday, hopefully a new and more vibrant MIC will rise tomorrow. A party which the Indians will once again embrace," he added.

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