

The 'fragile' pact to rebuild MIC
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The two veterans were sworn enemies. But external circumstances dictated that a truce be called. MCPX

subramaniam interview 141005 point outFor decades, former MIC deputy president S Subramaniam tried every trick in the political handbook to outflank his nemesis.

None worked, for the 72-year-old president was simply too formidable.

But when dawn broke on March 8, a force was unleashed upon MIC. So powerful that it humbled the mighty S Samy Vellu and left his party black and blue.

Reeling from the shock, the president decided to enlist his former deputy-turned-foe-now-turned ally for the daunting mission of rebuilding MIC and re-uniting the Indian community.

Subramaniam readily agreed thinking this was nothing short of divine intervention to revive his inanimate political career.

On the same day, the pair also drove to Putrajaya to inform Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi about their patching up and to discuss other matters.

"Subramaniam then jumped the gun and called for a press conference to announce that he is willing to cast aside his differences with the leadership and offered his help to rebuild MIC," said a source.

samy vellu pc 120308 talkingThis drew more brickbats than bouquets, especially with Samy Vellu turning the tables the next day and stating that Subramaniam has been wanting to meet him for two months.

According to the source, the backlash - even from some of his loyal supporters - caught the former MIC deputy president by surprise.

It is learnt that certain quarters have also mounted a campaign to boycott the Subramaniam-linked Tamil daily Makkal Osai in the wake of the reconciliation.

Retirement date

"His supporters are upset because of three reasons," said the source. "One, they were not consulted. Two, why did he agree without a concrete takeover plan and three, why the rush in announcing the partnership when even the cabinet had not been formed."

"The supporters felt that an agreement should have been made based on terms set by him," he added.

As for the Indian community, he said they want Samy Vellu to vacate his post. "The longer he stays and remains in the public eye, the more complicated matters will become."

In a bid to placate his supporters, Subramaniam is expected to press the MIC president to publicly announce a retirement date and if possible endorse the former as his successor.

"There must be an indication of some sort from Samy Vellu that he is going for good and this indication must come soon or Subramaniam will find himself in a bigger fix," said the source.

"The situation is really bad on the ground. The truce has become the laughing stock of the community. The move has also severely dented his popularity," he added.

subramaniam police report maika 010907 supportersHe said Subramaniam must also find a solution for the Maika Holdings issue and iron out other details like party and government positions.

"If this cannot be done, then the deal should be called off. It would be wiser for Subramaniam to step aside respectably and consider other options instead of being dragged down as well.

"Why should he inherit a party with so many loose ends? MIC is weak, BN (Barisan Nasional) is weak, the opposition may come into power and the Indian community is divided," he added.

Maika Holdings is the debt-ridden investment arm of MIC which has been embroiled in a protracted controversy after shareholders accused it of shortchanging them.

Subramaniam has been one of the leading crusaders against Maika Holdings, which is helmed by the MIC president's son Vel Paari.

It is learnt that Subramaniam's supporters have given him a month to resolve all these issues, failing which, he could lose a sizeable chunk to the opposition.

What about Palanivel?

Meanwhile, the source also pointed out another factor to the Samy Vellu-Subramaniam equation - current deputy president G Palanivel.

"Is he willing to step aside and allow Subramaniam to take control of MIC or will he put up a challenge?" he asked.

samy vellu pc 120308 palanivelPalanivel was Samy Vellu's hatchet man in driving out Subramaniam from the top echelon in the 2006 party polls.

Prior to March 8, Palanivel was sailing along placid waters although rumours abounded that his relationship with the president had soured.

The current rough weather, however, has put pressure on him to make a stand. "His supporters see the alliance as unfair to him, it is a case of being used and disposed."

On Palanivel lacking grassroots support, the source said: "Never rule out any politician. Crises have a way of bringing out certain qualities in people ... qualities that in the past had no reason to be showcased. But it is an entirely different ball game now."

Since MIC leaders were shown the exit by voters - the top brass fell into an eerie silence - save for Samy Vellu making statements now and then and party information chief M Saravanan - one of the survivors of the March 8 massacre - reminding the public that MIC is still breathing.

On Sunday, Palanivel decided to make himself heard.

He came out with a hard-hitting statement on BN's lacklustre performance and conceded MIC's error in not taking notice of the brewing storm.

While stressing on the need to rebuild MIC, the deputy president, however, did not make any mention about Subramaniam.

On that note, the source also did not discount the possibility of a deal being struck between Subramaniam and Palanivel to prevent future feuds.

"Infighting is the last thing MIC needs at this point in time," he said.

Neutral candidate

Meanwhile, the source also said much hinges on who becomes the next secretary-general since the incumbent Dr S Subramaniam - who also escaped the electoral culling - has been appointed a cabinet minister.

"Subramaniam's camp wants a neutral candidate. If another Samy Vellu man assumes the post, then trouble will erupt. So a deal must be reached on this as well," he said.

Another source said it is almost certain that Samy Vellu - who has helmed MIC for 28 years - will call it quits soon.

"The president tried hard to retain the works ministry under the party's control but the ministry has now fallen into the hands of Umno...he is very disappointed," he said.

As for the presidential elections slated for 2009, the source predicted that it will be a "free-for-all slugfest."

"If Subramaniam starts flexing his muscles from now, he stands a good chance of assuming total control of the party. He must lay down his terms, especially concerning the branches.

mic gathering cheras 200108 huge abduallah poster"MIC is there for the taking. All he needs to do is play his cards right and show a little grit. The grassroots are in desperate need of direction and hope," he added.

He also said that Subramaniam's strategy of keeping himself relevant via a newspaper has been fruitful.

"Despite being cast into the political wilderness, he was never far from mind or sight. This is something that made Samy Vellu very uncomfortable.

"He continued to project himself as an alternative force. But the Indians now have the opposition as an alternative so Subramaniam must work extra hard to prove that he is still

relevant."

The observer was also quick to point out that the fate of MIC is now lodged between a rock and a hard place.

"The situation has deteriorated to a level where even with Samy Vellu leaving and Subramaniam returning, it may not be enough to salvage the party. Unless, the opposition falls short of expectations and the swing reverses in the next polls.

"MIC's fate is no longer in the hands of one man as it used to be. It is now intertwined with many other factors and only time will tell if the party can survive," he said.

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