

Q&A : 'Samy Vellu still relevant'
Malaysiakini.com
Mar 22, 2008
RK Anand

Recovering from its devastation in the March 8 polls - which also saw its president S Samy Vellu and his generals losing their seats -MIC is now trying to pick up the pieces. MCPX

Many feel that the party is on the brink of extinction but its leaders continue to remain optimistic about its survival. They have promised to fine-tune their approaches to better suit the present situation.

It was simply the case of a ticking time-bomb and the Indian community's pent-up frustrations detonated on Nov 25 last year.

Some 30,000 disgruntled Indians took to the streets for a rally organised by the Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf).

dr s subramaniam interview 210308 05From then onwards it was downhill for MIC.

In an interview with Malaysiakini yesterday, party secretary-general Dr S Subramaniam talked about the uphill task of rebuilding MIC.

Subramaniam, who is the human resources minister, is MIC's new face in the cabinet in nearly three decades following the defeat of the party's veteran president and former works minister.

Below are some excerpts from the interview.

Malaysiakini: Certain quarters are saying that the party can only be salvaged if Samy Vellu steps down. Do you agree with this view?

samy vellu pc 120308 talkingSubramaniam: As far as MIC, the people who elected him are concerned, Datuk Seri Samy Vellu still has tremendous support within the party, within the branches, within the members. So I think as far as the party's support for him is concerned, there has been no dwindling in that.

Even in the aftermath of the polls?

I think it's still there. That's why you don't find anything (calls on him to resign) from the party. These people who are saying (this) are outsiders, those who are outside the party. These critics have always been there. And...as it is, he is a consolidating factor for the party, particularly in this present situation. So I think, that is political, so as far as the political realities of the party are concerned, his presidency is still relevant.

Do you think bringing back former deputy president S Subramaniam into the fold is a good move or will it pave the way for another power struggle?

Well, I think that was the president's move as part of an overall policy, a thing to reduce

camps within the Indian community. He (Subramaniam) is one component of it. He (Samy Vellu) also discussed with the various IPF (Indian Progressive Front) segments. By doing so, we hope that these divisive factors which could have contributed (to the party's defeat can be united). Because the divisive factors, you know we had two papers, the Tamil press, which were expressing different views and contributing to further divisions. All this could be reduced, so that we can go forth with a more united and unified Indian community. So this is part of a greater programme...so as time goes by we can unify the Indian community in addressing the new challenges we are going to face.

Some are concerned that Subramaniam's return could spark off a political tussle.

subramaniam interview 141005 ponderingWell, you must see it in the current perspective. He has actually not returned, I think people got it all wrong. He is still a division chairman of the MIC, the Seputeh division, with all the rights of any member of MIC. So whether we state it that he has returned or don't state it, his right is always there.

So there is no change to that right. We have not given him any added rights more than what he already has. So by exercising that right, if he wanted to contest for any post in 2009 (presidential elections), we cannot stop him so likewise he has every liberty to exercise the rights he has. So that term actually is a misnomer - return. If he was somebody we had expelled or removed from the party and he is coming back, then it's right. But this is not (the case), he is still very much an active chairman of a bahagian (division) within MIC. So it's not actually a return or anything, it's just maybe two people (Samy Vellu and Subramaniam) with different opinions reconciling their opinions more than anything else.

It is more like a return to the leadership...

That I think, we don't know what he had in mind. He might still have gone, whether this (reconciliation) talks had gone on or not, he might have still gone for a post, we would not have known.

There are those who say that race-based parties no longer have a future in this country and multiracial parties is the way forward. In that context, how do you see MIC's future?

Although being race-based, we have been functioning in a broader multiracial platform that is Barisan Nasional. I think to confront the new challenges, the Barisan Nasional per se can become more active and more apparent in handling issues which are more multiracial in dimension, without actually breaking down the present structure of the coalition as such. The decision to actually become a single, uniformed, multi-race party can only be done if all the other component parties are of the same opinion.

Putting that aside, the only way, of course, is for the Barisan Nasional to be more functional in representing multiracial views which we are now doing within the ambits of our meetings. But if that became more apparent, more visible, then it can be the alternative to what the other opposition parties, which are purportedly multiracial, are exhibiting.

There are reports stating that MIC grassroots are abandoning ship and jumping to

opposition parties. How bad is the situation?

These are all rumours. We have not had any serious grassroots leader having gone across. There are of course those who are opposed to us who have always been there and some of them have actually remained in the party but they have been opposed (to us) even before this (elections). They might have been seen doing this (crossing over). Although I have heard these rumours, but in terms of real reports of this so and so has gone, we have not had any such reports. So, I don't think it's a major thing at the present moment.

What about losing the works ministry? Some consider this a blow to MIC.

Yeah, we have had that for a long time. According to the prime minister, he says all ministries are equally important, so don't give value to ministries - one is more important than the other. So in that sense, he says even the human resources ministry is important in the present thrust of the government on capacity building, human capital development. This is one of the main goals of the government, which he (the prime minister) feels is one of the most important requirements of the Indian community at the present time.

So it is difficult for us to ascribe value to ministries and see which is more superior, which is less superior, and to get disturbed by it. I know the concerns, but an explanation has been given by the leaders who made the decision, so we accept it, and we will use the platform which has been given to us to achieve whatever we wanted to achieve as far as the community is concerned.

As the MIC secretary-general and cabinet member, what is your hope for the Indian community?

The community has been fighting a long battle. I did an analysis, we will have about 600,000... approximately Indian families in Malaysia. If we take one family is three to four people, approximately that will be the amount, our population is around there. Out of which, one third are quite okay, they don't require any support from any other agencies to take care of them. The other two third, one third actually wants all the facilities available within the government to be available to them fairly so that they can plug into that system and develop themselves. The other third are the ones who require some proactive intervention because of some reasons so that they can come up the social ladder and be competitive.

malaysia poor indian community poverty 230807So these two groups, I think we are fighting for their needs, in the sense that we want the government to provide opportunities which are available to others in terms of training, educational opportunities and job opportunities so that they can strengthen themselves. And to the other group (help should be extended) in terms of capacity building, poverty eradication programmes, training for those in the lower-income group so that the group will also come up.

Once we have achieved those two targets, then the Malaysian Indian community will be in the same state as the other communities in this country and play its legitimate role as equal citizens of the country. I think once we reach the target, our goal would have been achieved. This we will do.

I consider this as a transition period in our social evolution of a estate-based community to an urban-based community. We will overcome this challenge, so once we become a more stable urban community, we will be able to take on the challenges of the urban

environment. Then we will be able to find our own place and become a successful community.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.
Source : <http://www.malysiakini.com/news/80235>