

Education a key MIC thrust

As the MIC turns 60 today, M. KRISHNAMOORTHY takes a look at how the party has transformed into a respectable component of the ruling Barisan Nasional over the decades.

SOON after Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu announced the party's 60th anniversary plans two weeks ago, after the Central Working Committee meeting, he met a smiling couple and their daughter.

If he had thought they were there to ask for a favour, he was mistaken.

The MIC president shook hands with the father. As Samy Vellu stopped to chat for a moment with the family, the father said: "Thank you very much Datuk Seri. My daughter can now continue her education with this loan, and I just got the approval letter."

Samy Vellu had what and where his daughter was going to further her studies.

The girl is among 10,000 students who obtained loans and scholarships totalling about RM60mil in the past 20 years from the MIED fund, the education arm of the MIC. Education opportunities are among the most tangible contributions by the party to the community in the annals of its history.

Helping Indians obtain a better quality of education has been the party's main thrust.

Today, as the MIC enters its sixth decade, Samy Vellu has set a national record of having led a mainstream party for 26 years.

Samy Vellu's tenure as party chief saw the party being transformed into a

respectable partner of the Barisan.

He believes the poorest man is not the one Without a cent, but the man without a dream. And his dream was to lead the party and take it to greater heights.

His dream was realised on Oct 12, 1979, when he succeeded Tan Sri V. Manickavasagam who died in office.

The party was formed to check social problems such as low literacy level, alcoholism and family violence faced by the Indian community.

Its founder president was John A. Thivy (1946-1947).

At the outset, the party was committed to positive inter-racial harmony and cooperation and obtaining a fair share of the economic cake for the Indian community.

It was the intense anti-British sentiment that made the MIC under the leadership of its second president Budh Singh (1947-1950) critical of the Malayan Union, which did not obtain Indian support.

The second phase of the party began, under its third president K. Ramananthan when the MIC contested in the 1952 Kuala Lumpur Municipal Elections in alliance with the multi-racial Independent Malayan Party (IMP) under Datuk Onn Jaafar and other non-communal organisations.

However the results showed that the



RECORD TENURE: Samy Vellu, seen here being chaired by supporters after winning an eighth term unopposed as party president in 1997, has set a record as having led the party for 26 years.

MIC's attempt to preach and practise non-communalism would not prevail in Malayan politics when communalism was the winning factor.

In 1954, the MIC under its fourth leader K.L. Devaser (1951-1955) became the third partner in the Alliance with Umno and the MCA after realising that political alignments were fundamental between the various organisations in the country.

The third phase of the MIC's history

was its consolidation. Under Tun V.T. Sambanthan who took over the party's leadership as the fifth president (1955-1973) the party grew in membership and became a mass-based party, at the same time firmly entrenching itself as a partner of the Alliance.

The finest hour was achieved on Aug 31, 1957 when Independence was achieved under the Merdeka Agreement, to which Sambanthan was a signatory.

The greatest challenge that the party faced during this time was the fragmentation of estates, the livelihood of almost all Indian workers.

In a bid to help the fragmentation, the party sponsored cooperative efforts to acquire estates and prevent displacement of the workers.

This witnessed the birth of the National Land Finance Cooperative Society (NLFCS).

The fourth phase of the party began with Manickavasagam as the sixth president and it was during his that the MIC became part of the Barisan.

The party sponsored the Nesa Multipurpose Cooperative and the MIC Unit Trust as part of its programme for economic ventures, and also set up the MIC Education Fund for members' children and the Malaysian Indian Scholarship for higher education.

Of course, it was under the tenure of the seventh president Samy Vellu, who was born in a rubber plantation on March 8, 1936, that the party's image of "chair-throwing meetings" was erased, and the party transformed into a respectable organisation.

Now, the MIC is considered a caring association, providing many services and meeting the needs of the community.

Like a leader put it, whether the community likes or not, the MIC is its only representative in the Government and the leaders must understand that the community's destiny lies in the party's hands.