

# Subramaniam's political career hits rock bottom

IT is the end of an era.

What started out as a promising career for Datuk S. Subramaniam hit a hump when he challenged party president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu in 1989 and ended in a cul-de sac yesterday.

But his critics argued that yesterday was merely the culmination of a three-year downward spiral in his political career.

Things started to worsen in March 2004 when he was dropped as an MIC candidate in the general election.

Samy Vellu said Subramaniam's reluctance to come to his defence when Indian Progressive Front president Datuk M.G. Pandithan openly called for Samy Vellu's resignation in 2003 was the reason for dropping him. Since then, Subramaniam has been left out in the cold with no government position, sidelined in the party's decision-making process and seen his support in the party waning.

When Samy Vellu endorsed Datuk G. Palanivel as his favoured candidate for the deputy presidency, it would have taken Subramaniam back to the party elections in 1977. That year, Subramaniam was party president Tan Sri V. Manickavasagam's blue-eyed boy and party secretary-general vying for the deputy president's post.

His opponent, a fiery orator with an underdog tag, was Samy Vellu.

In the hard-fought battle, despite the fact that the MIC machinery was working for Subramaniam, Samy Vellu won by 26 votes after visiting delegates' door-to-door.

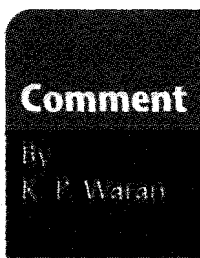
Before that contest, Subramaniam's political star had been shining brightly.

He was thrust into the limelight in the 1974 general election when given the Daman-sara parliamentary seat. His opponent was political veteran V David of the DAP.

Knowing that the electorate preferred the Opposition, Subramaniam worked tirelessly, meeting university students, businessmen and the common folk. He charmed the voters and won the seat.

Four years later, Subramaniam lost to David in the same constituency but was appointed a Senator, retaining his deputy minister's post.

Following the death of Manickavasagam in 1979, Samy Vellu took over the helm and the bitter rivalry between him and Subramaniam continued unabated.



In 1989, Subramaniam fought Samy Vellu for the presidency and lost but held on to his deputy's position.

He faced a contest in 1994, but easily headed off Datuk S.S. Subramaniam's challenge.

Samy Vellu has over the years complained that he had not been able to work with Subramaniam.

He has also said that the deputy president had not used opportunities to prove himself and that he had stabbed the party chief in the back.

While many are bound to be sympathetic to Subramaniam's downfall, others may point to the ex-deputy president's poor track record in helping the community which he hotly disputes.

His supporters insist that Samy Vellu never gave Subramaniam the opportunity to prove his worth, suppressing the younger man in many ways, including denying him a Cabinet position.

Prior to Samy Vellu helming the party, the MIC enjoyed two ministerial positions — one held by Tun V.T. Sambanthan and the other by Manickavasagam.

But Samy Vellu opted for another arrangement that meant losing a ministership for two deputy minister's posts.

Palanivel's advance up the party ladder to the position of appointed successor to Samy Vellu has been due to the open support of the party chief himself.

It cannot be denied that without the party president pulling the strings, the *ex-Bernama* journalist would have had little chance of toppling the deputy president of 24 years.

While his detractors may claim that this may sound the death knell for Subramaniam's political career, others are hoping his day will come when Palanivel eventually inherits the party.

They are hopeful that Subramaniam will make a successful comeback having served the party as executive secretary, secretary-general, vice-president and deputy president for close to four decades.