

# MIC in their hearts and minds

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The MIC, which held its 61st general assembly over the weekend, has proven its strength by ensuring the Indian community's support for the Barisan Nasional when it matters.

**N**O MIC general assembly is complete without a motivating anecdote from party supremo Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu.

This time was no different as he told the story of a train with several compartments chugging along on a railway line.

Unfortunately, he said, one segment got derailed and was left behind, as the train continued on its journey.

The party president likened the fate of the Indian community to the derailed compartment, saying that it had been left behind for almost 100 years, without much improvement.

"It was only after the country gained independence that concrete steps were taken to improve our lot," he told the party's 1,450 delegates who attended the assembly over the weekend.

Stressing that their work to uplift the Indian community has to go on, he said: "I want the leaders to listen to the problems of the people. We must go to them, not wait for them to come to us."

Fresh from leading the Barisan Nasional's successful campaign in regaining the Ijok state seat in Selangor last month, Samy Vellu did not mince his words when he told MIC's Members of Parliament and state assemblymen to work for their respective constituencies.

The party president, who had initially said he would not interfere in the debates by delegates, could not resist telling off those who wasted time by dwelling on trivial issues.

He was particularly incensed when one delegate suggested that the party MPs and representatives should speak on what they had achieved over the past year.

"If that's the case, then branch leaders should also speak about what they had done. I know of branch leaders who are functioning without even having any meetings.

"If you all want, then I will ask all the CWC (central working commit-

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DATUK SERI S. SAMY VELLU

tee) members also to speak. We will have the meeting until 10pm," he said sarcastically.

Among the positive highlights of this year's assembly was the attendance of Indian Progressive Front (IPF) president Datuk M.G. Pandithan after an absence of 20 years.

Some delegates said Pandithan's participation augured well for the Indian community, as it could help consolidate the fragmented Indian community.

Touching on the attendance of Pandithan, a former MIC vice-president, Samy Vellu said he was willing to work closely with the IPF members.

"Whatever IPF wants, we will consider. If they want to merge with us, we can also look into it," he said.

On the issue of education, Wanita MIC chief Komala Krishnamoorthy said one reason for the shortage of teachers in Tamil schools was the concerted effort of Samy Vellu.

"He has done so much for the Tamil schools, especially for UPSR pupils, resulting in more pupils scoring 7As. This has resulted in the enrolment of Year One pupils increasing to 18,350," she said.

Yayasan Sosial Strategik executive director Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria said Samy Vellu had stressed that the Indians might be a small community but they could make a difference in numerous parliamentary constituencies.

"Indian votes can have influence where they comprise 15% to 20% of the electorate," he said.

Dr Jayasooria said the party president had emphasised that the MIC must strengthen its voter base, and be more receptive to the needs and voices of the people.

"Despite criticism from certain quarters, the Indian community has strongly backed the Barisan Nasional, but there is a need to ensure that the ruling coalition delivers its promises," he said.

Before the end of the assembly, Samy Vellu said the MIC had come through a hard and difficult path to become the party in the hearts of the Indian community.

"We can be termed as Big, Strong and Friendly, like the *jaga* (watchman) in the old bank advertisement. No one can shake us for now or another 50 years to come. We will not be cowed by the challenges and would strive ahead," he said.

Samy Vellu said that even if other parties claimed they had a huge membership of Indians, those in the community knew that the MIC was in their hearts and minds.