

Samy Vellu - politician extraordinaire

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TUN S. SAMY VELLU would have been 88 years old last Friday, March 8. It has been barely 18 months since his passing, and Samy Vellu, the icon of MIC, is greatly missed by his legions of supporters and admirers.

March 8 has always been a big day in his long and illustrious political and ministerial career, which is always celebrated with great fanfare. Gigantic garlands and large crowds would besiege his residence to shake hands with the much-loved politician.

As a journalist, I covered him extensively and had many exclusive interviews with him when he was the works minister, Energy, Telecommunications and Post minister and a long-serving Member of Parliament for the Sungai Siput constituency.

Whenever Samy Vellu turned up at Parliament, all the attention would turn towards him. He loved journalists and they loved him in equal measure as everything he said was newsworthy and headline-grabbing.

He was a man of many talents - a stage actor and dramatist and a popular Tamil news reader for RTM before contesting in the Sungai Siput parliamentary constituency in the

1974 general election.

His Tamil oratorical skills were of a high standard, and he could sing very well and was fond of old melodies. His political speeches drew large audiences.

Samy Vellu, who died at the age of 86 in September 2022 was the push-pull factor in organising the sixth International Tamil Conference in Malaysia in the 1980s. This won him the appreciation of Tamil scholars and educationists around the world.

He held steadfast to the belief that "reading makes a full man, speaking and writing makes an exact man".

His hobby was contributing poems to the media. This was one way for him to manage stress. He believed that trust is the glue of life and the most essential ingredient in effective communication.

Samy Vellu always engaged with the community. The trust in his leadership increased the Indian community's loyalty towards MIC. He aimed to bring pride to the community and help them advance economically.

Samy Vellu's greatest contribution to the Indian community was the setting up of the Maju Institute of Education Development, which was established in 1984 as a private non-profit organisation to provide



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educational loans.

He was also the driving force in the establishment of TAFE (Technical and Further Education) College in Seremban, and the Asian Institute of Medicine, Science and Technology University in Bedong, Kedah to enable more Indian youths to get tertiary and vocational qualifications and skills.

Samy Vellu was the longest-serving MIC president, and he helmed the party for 11 terms from 1979 to 2010. He also holds the record for being one of the longest-serving ministers.

He left behind a great legacy and indelible mark when he was works minister. He spearheaded the

construction of modern highways, spanning the length and breadth of the country.

He served under three prime ministers, namely Tun Hussein Onn, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Tun Abdullah Badawi, until 2008.

He taught us that being a leader does not mean only having a vision but also a heart. Humanity mattered more to him. He was loved unreservedly by the party.

When he left politics in 2010, many saw it as the demise of MIC. It was a regular sight to see people lining up outside his home and office with various problems, and he would stop to attend to them. The passing of Samy

Vellu was the end of an era that will never return.

Samy Vellu had a following among people of different races, and he was a great advocate of the power-sharing concept among races. He was articulate and meticulous in whatever he said and did.

His presence in Parliament made debates interesting and lively. He was an open book, having nothing to hide. He was also full of wit. He always looked dashing and was smartly attired.

The then works minister Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof recounted that his predecessor was someone who took his job seriously.

He noted that Samy Vellu had changed the country's infrastructure for the better and paved the path of development to what it is today.

Best known for his firebrand politics, he had an appeal wherever he went because his identity was tied to MIC.

One Umno leader said at the Parliament lobby: "If this politician were in Umno, he would have become the prime minister."

Patriotism is one of the core values of MIC. Caring for the nation and the protection of our beloved Malaysia remains the party's unshakeable mission.

**Perugi Perumal
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