

Disquiet in MIC over 'winnable' election candidate list
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KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 3 — Some MIC officials are upset that party president Datuk Seri G. Palanivel will contest the Cameron Highlands seat while PEMANDU director Ravindran Devagunam is slated to stand in Kapar in the coming general election despite a host of capable candidates who believe they can win back seats lost in Election 2008.

The Malaysian Insider understands that both names are in a fresh list sent to Barisan Nasional (BN) chairman Datuk Seri Najib Razak after an earliest list was rejected.

"Both Palanivel and Ravindran's names are on the new list given to Najib. Palanivel for Cameron Highlands and Ravindran for Kapar," a source told The Malaysian Insider.

Najib has told his allies in BN that he will have final say in the list of candidates, including seat allocations after the 13-party coalition was mauled in Election 2008, losing its customary two-thirds parliamentary majority and four states. Then BN chief and Prime Minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi made way in April 2009 for Najib,

who has expressed confidence of sweeping all state and most federal seats for his own personal mandate in the next general election that must be called by April 2013.

The Umno president has also insisted that all parties ensure they offer "winnable" candidates, which could rule out many division chiefs who have held power over the years in the hope of contesting any of the 222 federal seats and 505 state seats up for grabs in all states except Sarawak, which had its state elections last year.

"The PM wants winnable candidates but it can't be that MIC doesn't have them until he has to put the president in a safe seat or pick one from outside," a senior MIC official told The Malaysian Insider on condition of anonymity.

Cameron Highlands in Najib's Pahang home state is seen as safe due to the large number of Umno members there. It is one of three federal seats the MIC won in the March 2008 general election, one-third of the total the party won in the 2004 elections.

Several other MIC leaders have already expressed their dissatisfaction about Palanivel replacing current Cameron Highlands MP Datuk S.K. Devamany to the Free Malaysia Today news portal. The two-term MP is a party vice-president and a deputy minister.

One of them said fielding Palanivel would be a "political suicide for BN" and the ruling coalition will lose the seat. The journalist-turned-politician held Hulu Selangor for four terms until his defeat in Election 2008 to a PKR candidate by just 198 votes. But BN dropped Palanivel in the Hulu Selangor by-election in 2010, offering him a senatorship in return.

Ravindran, a PEMANDU director, is said to be slated as a candidate for the Kapar parliamentary seat.

He replaced his former boss, the long-serving Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, as MIC president in December 2010 and named a minister a year.

Palanivel is not the only one getting vitriol from some party officials, who are also concerned that Ravindran is being groomed for the Kapar seat, now held by PKR's S. Manikavasagam. Coincidentally, Ravindran is related to another Manikavasagam, the late Tan Sri V. Manickavasagam who was MIC's sixth president and Samy Vellu's predecessor.

"There are professionals within the party, so what makes him special? He is a government consultant who is paid to work on programmes that involve Indians and that shouldn't be used as a basis for his candidacy," one MIC official told The Malaysian Insider, referring to Ravindran's job in the government efficiency unit, Performance Management and Delivery Unit (PEMANDU).

"I hope Palanivel will do the right thing and reject his name. Is he even a member?" the official asked.

Ravindran oversees anti-corruption-related initiatives of the National Key Result Areas (NKRA) and also manages the Electrical and Electronics and the Wholesale-Retail Labs under the New Key Economic Areas (NKEA), focusing on the Tukar programme that seeks to uplift the livelihood of grocery shop owners.

Another MIC official noted that Ravindran has worked closely with the party to identify Indian grocery shop owners who qualify for the programme but said this was more the party's efforts than just the consultant's. "I hope he isn't using the programme and the party for his own ambitions," the official said.

Before PEMANDU, Ravindran, who is trained in aerospace engineering, spent 16 years abroad working for multinationals and consultancies such as Booz-Allen & Hamilton, AT Kearney and Deloitte Consulting SEA. He started his career as a technical services engineer and project engineer with flag carrier Malaysia Airlines.

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