

MIC's continued relevance being questioned
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KUALA LUMPUR, May 7 — Barisan Nasional (BN) managed to coax many Indian voters — by increasing welfare handouts, among other things — back into its fold in Sunday's election but that did not translate into a better performance for its component party MIC.

The Straits Times reported that the party won just four parliamentary seats out of the nine it contested, one more than what it won in 2008 and the same number it had before the election. In the state assemblies, it mustered just five out of 18 seats contested, two fewer than in 2008.

MIC president Datuk G. Palanivel squeaked past the DAP's Manogaran Marimuthu in the Cameron Highlands federal seat by just 462 votes. His vice-president S.K. Devamany, a deputy minister, was defeated by incumbent Dr Michael Jeyakumar with a 2,793-vote margin in Sungai Siput.

The Singapore daily reported that the MIC's presence in Parliament has shrunk from 2004, when it won nine seats in the election. The opposition Pakatan Rakyat alliance, which has multi-racial parties, now has more than twice as many Indian MPs as the MIC, raising questions about the MIC's continued relevance.

"It's already becoming insignificant as a representative of the community," the newspaper quoted Dr Denison Jayasooria, principal research fellow at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's Institute of Ethnic Studies, as saying.

The MIC has long been attacked for being ineffective in improving the lot of poor Indians.

The Straits Times reported that the party, hurt by fiery criticism by Hindraf, lost the Sungai Siput seat held by then president Datuk Seri D. Samy Vellu in 2008. It has never quite recovered, despite a pact signed between Hindraf and BN weeks before Sunday's polls, it added.

Of late, the government has bypassed MIC, dispensing help directly to the Indian community. The government has also given more money to Tamil schools, and issued identity cards to thousands of ethnic Indians who did not have them despite being born in Malaysia, it reported.

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