

Datuk G. Palanivel wants to close ranks within the MIC in the wake of a bruising battle for the deputy presidency post that he won in convincing style on Saturday.

A day after trouncing Datuk S. Subramaniam, he talks to M.K. MEGAN about his plans for the party and the need for all to work together for the Indian community.

Q: What are your thoughts after this crushing victory?

A: I am not overjoyed. I try not to have extremes in moods in joy or in sorrow. But I must say that had I been defeated, I would still have attended the rest of the assembly proceedings. (Subramaniam was absent yesterday) In politics, we have to face these situations. Victory has given me extra burdens and responsibilities.

Q: Will this contest split the party?

A: In politics, we have to be team players. The deputy president's post does not belong to an individual. I am part of a team. I will have to value add to myself and the position to make the MIC a better party.

Q: How will you close ranks?

A: There is no need to do so as I do not see a split in the party. This was evident after the results were announced yesterday. I received 933 votes but the number of delegates who came and congratulated and shook hands with me were more than 1,000. That itself shows that we have closed ranks. There was no anger or resentment among delegates. There were no untoward incidents. I feel a sense of unity among the people.

Q: Your sentiments on Subramaniam's supporters?

A: If there are some Subramaniam supporters who are still feeling sad, I do not blame them.

It is normal. But I urge them to come work together with us for the betterment of the party and the community.

Q: Can you identify the fac-

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tors that contributed to your victory?

A: It was a collective effort. All the candidates pitched in. I think the MIC grassroots also liked the idea of a change in the person holding the deputy presidency. Just imagine what would have happened if the incumbent had won. There would have been an "upset" and where there is unhappiness, there will be no unity. I want to claim the credit for uniting party members.

Q: Did you expect to secure such a big majority?

A: In politics we must be prepared for any result in an election. Sometimes we go up and at times we go down. But looking back in this case, I feel happy and humbled that the community gave me the second-highest position in the party when there were hundreds of other qualified people.

Q: What are your plans?

A: I intend to carry out all the projects that I have promised through my ministry and Government to the people. I will also look into whatever else needs to be done for the people.

Q: How will you use your position to increase Indian eq-

uity from the current 1.2 per cent to three per cent?

A: I don't want to talk about the three per cent equity here. My primary role will be to empower the 30 per cent of the lower-income group among the Indians so that they will have the habit of saving money. Only when they have the saving habit can we talk about these people owning equity. Therefore, we have to tackle the immediate problem first.

Q: You have said that you always think of the future in planning things for today.

A: In politics, if you work well today, tomorrow will take care of itself. When we work, we should not think of self-interest. We have to work with the community in mind.

Q: How has the Barisan National leadership responded to your victory?

A: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi telephoned me last night to congratulate me and offered advice on the duties of a deputy president. This was only the second time that he has called me at home.

The first was when his wife, Datin Seri Endon Mahmood, died. My minister (Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil) also called to congratulate me.