

It's Samy's choice for MIC delegates

The Sun - 23/6/2006

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"I DON'T want to support any team, because whatever team I support will win," said Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu when he was asked about three weeks ago which World Cup team he favours.

He said he knows very little about the tournament and much less about the participating teams but he thinks Argentina may make it to the finals.

But talk about MIC politics and Samy Vellu, party president for almost three decades, will say almost without hesitation that his man Datuk G. Palanivel will oust Datuk S. Subramaniam, his long time deputy - and only rival.

It is as if he knows already the outcome of tomorrow's party elections. And why not? After all he not only controls the party machinery, not only holds all the cards but he is also the *de facto* campaign manager for Palanivel and the rest of his team.

Also as president since 1978, when some of its members were not even born, he had the

advantage of knowing almost everyone and had also written much of the ground rules.

Argentina may or may not make it to the finals but if "whatever team I support will win" applies to his team many in the party and MIC watchers outside are convinced that it is not an empty boast. The master politician, already happily ensconced in his presidential chair after he was unopposed last year, has been busy cranking up support for his chosen ones. In the past, delegates mostly voted as he told them to.

But unlike in the past, when Subramaniam's name headed the list of the favoured ones and the ones he must support for political or other reasons, this time - for the first time in a long while - a new name is at the top.

Thus, the big story about the MIC elections this time is whether most of the delegates will still vote as their president tells them to knowing that by so doing they will lose a familiar face - now being portrayed as that of a patient Laxamanan, or whether many more will join the

ranks of the rebels.

It is not so much about vice-president Palanivel, the president's loyal acolyte, challenging the incumbent deputy president. As a loyalist he will do whatever the president tells him to. And he has been told that he will win.

Samy Vellu, who had tolerated Subramaniam after he came close to edging him out in 1989, decided some time ago, especially after the deputy president survived a challenge in 1994, that the man must not inherit the party.

Gradually the deputy president began losing his powers and he was much isolated in the central working committee of the party. In keeping true to his pledge not to challenge the president ever again after 1989, Subramaniam simply settled down to wait.

After a while his patience caused party members, especially his supporters, to ask him whether there was nothing else he could do other than growing old playing Biblical Job. Only then did he begin to move. Samy Vellu saw the signs and decided he had to finish off Subramaniam. An opportunity to further clip whatever influence Subramaniam had left presented itself when a change occurred in the country's leadership in 2005.

When Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi called for the general election in March 2004, Samy Vellu did not nominate his deputy as a candidate.

Deprived of a government post - he was a deputy minister - Subramaniam's public profile diminished significantly. And then the process of intimating - by drips and drabs - to MIC members and the public that the


president was considering a new number two began.

The stage of half-denials followed before Samy Vellu finally removed his mask and announced publicly what most people had already expected.

By which time everything was already in place to ensure that Subramaniam's political life is snuffed out completely. He must be edged out as otherwise Samy Vellu will be in trouble in the next presidential election.

Typical of Subramaniam, he is fighting back by mostly harping on "I am not challenging anyone but merely defending my position as deputy president".

Another refrain of his, which may yet go down as another

 I waited patiently but this is what has happened."

- Subramaniam

classic, is "I waited patiently but this is what has happened" a reference to Samy Vellu's decision to replace him with Palanivel. But what else can he do besides going around the country knocking on the delegates' doors. And he is not known to be rich.

There are many who want to help him - not because they truly like him but because they think Samy Vellu had overstayed - but then most of them are outside the party.

"But they are Indians and if they go all out to persuade the delegates to thumb their noses at Samy Vellu, Subramaniam may yet retain his position and a chance to mount a campaign against the president in two years - it is his only chance," said a Tamil newspaper editor.

Palanivel is his own man

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