



# Happy Birthday Sammy!

MIC President Datuk Seri S Samy Vellu got his birthday wish to be re-elected for the tenth consecutive term. Amidst the applause, however, one has to wish him luck as well, for the road ahead is long and arduous.

IT IS a significant event in one's life when one turns 70. But it is even more significant when at the same time, one gets to be elected president of a political party for the 10<sup>th</sup> consecutive term.

As expected, long-serving MIC President Datuk Seri S Samy Vellu got his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday wish this month. And judging from his remarks, he plans to be around for some time.

'This is not my last term. I will continue to serve the Indian community. I want to finish this journey,' he declared amidst applause and cheers from his supporters after being returned unopposed as party president on March 5.

But deep in his heart, the president must be shuddering at the daunting task ahead to achieve a quantum leap for the Indian community, both economically and socially. Despite being at the helm for 25 years, there is still much to accomplish.

Although Samy, the son of a rubber tapper, has achieved much during his tenure as party president, there are several longstanding issues that need urgent attention.

One major issue is the dismal failure of the party's investment arm Maika Holdings Bhd. Samy cannot escape the fact that it was during his tenure that the once profitable and cash-rich company slid into the red and can hardly declare dividends.

Far from being well managed, there have been delays in holding its annual general meetings. Strangely, it held its meeting on Nov 11 last year, much to the chagrin of shareholders who were unable to attend, given the lengthy Deepavali/Hari Raya holidays.

Also worrying is the mammoth accumulated losses of more than RM100 million as at Dec 31, 2004. To settle its debts, it has been disposing of its assets. It has sold down its controlling 77% stake in Oriental Capital Assurance Bhd to 41% currently. It also sold a large portion of its Tumbuk Estate land in Sepang, which many feel is at below market value.

Samy, who is patron and founder of Maika, should explain to the more than 60,000 shareholders as to why the once cash-rich company is now languishing under its chief executive Vel Pari, who, incidentally, is also his son.

Maika's Telekom Malaysia Bhd share controversy during

the mid-90s also needs to be settled once and for all. Even as recent as 2004, there were calls by various quarters to reopen the case where it was alleged that nine million Telekom Malaysia shares intended for Maika were diverted to several private companies allegedly linked to Samy.

It cannot be denied that the outspoken Samy has contributed in helping to alleviate the plight of the Indian community. But during his tenure, the community has become more divided as well.

In the late 80s, the-then vice-president M G Pandithan was expelled from MIC and went on to form the Indian Progressive Front (IPF). Today, although the IPF is an ardent supporter of the Barisan Nasional (BN), its

application to join the coalition has been opposed by MIC.

Then, you have the Peoples Progressive Party (PPP), a member of the BN, which has been capitalising on the infighting within the MIC to attract members. This has often led to a war of words between its president Datuk M Kayveas and Samy.


More recently, there have been attempts by disgruntled MIC members

to form a new party called 'MIC Baru', which, some say, is the result of Samy alienating party members not aligned to him.

Of course, his latest attempt to dislodge his deputy Datuk S Subramaniam in the coming party polls has further caused a rift in the party, given the long-serving Subramaniam's sizeable support within the grassroots. Shutting down branches aligned to Subramaniam over the years has not helped either.

So, after two-and-a-half decades as party president, can Samy say that he has unified the Indians in the country? Perhaps not.

There are other pressing issues. Samy has been severely criticised for various issues relating to his Works Ministry. Landslides, unsafe flyovers and floods have all drawn flak from the *rakyat*. There have been calls for him to be more accountable and transparent.

It is said the path of politics is never smooth. While we wish him a 'Very Happy Birthday', we also cannot but wish him luck, given the many challenges and obstacles ahead. 

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