

Malaysian Indian Congress emerges younger after poll

The Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) has emerged somewhat younger, but full of internal squabbles, from its 63rd general assembly.

The theme of the assembly was 'change'. This has come about in the form of a youthful team. S. Murugesan, 42, is secretary-general; Jaspal Singh, 47, is treasurer; and P. Kamalanathan, 42, is information chief.

Jaspal Singh, a second generation MIC activist, is a Sikh in a pre-dominantly Tamil party.

While Sikhs number about 100,000, Tamils form a bulk of the community that constitutes nearly eight percent of Malaysia's 28 million multi-racial population. The Indian community is nearly two million strong.

Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak, chief of the ruling coalition Barisan Nasional (BN) of which the MIC is an integral part, told the squabbling MIC leaders that it was not enough to be popular within the organisation. They must reach out to the community to regain the support base they lost in the general election last year.

The MIC leaders should not appear to be 'arrogant', he said in a mild rebuke last Saturday while opening the assembly.

The highlight of the assembly was the elections that had 'all the elements of a Tamil movie. There were emotional outbursts, tears of joy and sadness, anger and regrets', New Straits Times said Monday.

The outcome after three weeks of campaigning saw long-time President S. Samy Vellu's men prevailing and the challengers falling by the wayside.

In the fight for the vice-presidency, the sole woman candidate P. Mariayee secured only 61 votes from the 1,469 delegates. Three women who contested seats in the central working committee - G. Vimalah Nair, P. Logeswari and T. Ramanayagam - also lost, indicating that MIC is still a male-dominated entity.

Vellu has emerged stronger from the assembly. But there is resentment at his continuing to be the chief since 1979. Much of the challenge within the party is directed against him.

He was re-elected unopposed for the ninth time some weeks ago. But the general assembly that ended Sunday decided to impose a three-term limit to the president's and division chairman's posts.

The party will recruit younger and educated members through an online portal apart from opening more youth branches, Vellu said.

The election saw three new vice-presidents being voted in, as well as 13 new faces in the central working committee.

All three ministers who represent the party's Malaysia's federal government - Human Resources

Minister S. Subramaniam, Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department S.K. Devamany and Federal Territories Deputy Minister M. Saravanan - have been elected vice-presidents.

There were changes. The question is, will this be sufficient to revive the political fortunes of the 62-year-old party? New Straits Times asked.

This will indeed be a heavy responsibility for the new leaders. It is essential, following the party elections, that MIC members close ranks not only to strengthen and enhance its position but also to win the hearts and minds of the Indians, particularly those who rejected the party in the general election, the newspaper observed.

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