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Sanusi-Interview

SANUSI SAYS HE BEARS NO GRUDGES, URGES HARD WORK

By: Sobrey Jaafar

ALOR SETAR, June 16 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid, who is scheduled to be sworn in as Kedah's fifth Menteri Besar since Independence on Sunday, said he is not a man who bears grudges and he does not hold it against any person for having political views contrary to his.

He said what matters most is that the person should work hard to carry out the responsibilities entrusted to him.

"As far as I can recall, I have never taken action against anyone merely because he was not on the same political wavelength with me," he said in an interview with Bernama.

Sanusi, the Kuah assemblyman, stated these views on his thinking to refute talk that he might go after those who initially opposed his appointment.

"Nevertheless, I do admit I have taken firm action against many civil servants and several leading businessmen because of their irresponsible behaviour," said the former federal minister.

"For instance, when I was the Rural Development Minister, I cut short the term of service of a chairman of an agency under the ministry who was also a director of several subsidiary companies owned by the agency. The reason was that the agency and its subsidiaries were suffering losses while the chairman enjoyed a very attractive allowance.

"It was similar in the case of several senior officers of Mara who refused to give me the accounts of a company that I had asked for to study. They said they were only answerable to the chairman of Mara and I (as the minister) had no right to look at the accounts.

"When I was the Agriculture Minister, a senior officer responsible for the farming community was transferred because the officer was unsuitable, perhaps because he was 'more qualified' to hold a higher post," he said.

Sanusi said he is a man who follows his leader.

"I have never failed to obey a directive by the leader and, throughout my involvement in politics, only three times have I opposed the status quo," he said.

"The first time was when I took part in a demonstration in London to oppose (the then Prime Minister) Tunku Abdul Rahman after the Tunku expelled Dr Mahathir Mohamad from Umno.

"The second was when I opposed (then) Umno Youth leader (Datuk) Haji Suhaimi Kamaruddin and supported (Datuk Seri) Anwar Ibrahim in wresting the post and, the third, when I supported Encik (now Tun) Ghafar Baba in opposing Datuk (now Tan Sri) Musa Hitam for the post of Umno deputy president in 1987."

Sanusi said his loyalty to Dr Mahathir remained steadfast although he had to take more than a year of enforced "leave" and was not given any government post after being asked to contest a state seat in last year's general election.

Following are excerpts of the interview:

QUESTION: Datuk Seri is acknowledged as a man of many ideas, particularly in ways to upgrade the economic status of rural people. What are your plans for Kedah which is still largely rural?

ANSWER: Poverty eradication has a broad meaning. What is usually

debated is money poverty. If the aim is to wipe out money poverty, then effort has to be made to enable rural people, and also urban squatters, to market the goods they produce or services they can offer. Training has to be given in order that the rural community can produce goods that have a demand or services that are marketable. All of these need to be halal.

Q: What is the priority of Datuk Seri for the development of Kedah?

A: Since time is short, everything becomes a priority.

Q: The government spends millions of ringgit each year as subsidy for padi growers but their lot has changed little. As a former Agriculture Minister, Datuk Seri must certainly have a special programme to uplift the farmers....

A: Padi production is naturally done by the poor everywhere. Incomes will only grow if the padi field is large or converted to oil palm cultivation. Since our country needs a secured supply of rice, subsidies given should be considered as an incentive for padi growers to continue planting padi. Our country's economic situation has now changed. To increase the income of the rural community, particularly the padi farmers and padi land owners and rubber smallholders, their land can be turned into industrial sites. An acre of land used for industries can provide greater employment to the people than an acre of padi land.

Q: What is Datuk Seri's feeling on the appointment after more than a year outside the Cabinet and returning to Kedah without any government post?

A: I look upon my (new) post as a trust. I give thanks to God and thank YAB the Prime Minister. I don't feel anything else.

Q: Given the various obstacles that you have faced in the previous year, did you have any doubts that you will ever become MB?

A: I did not ask to become an MB. I merely accepted when offered. During my one-year leave, I travelled extensively and read very widely. I gained a lot in this way. A lot of things surfaced during that one-year period. Without the one-year gap, the hidden things would not have surfaced and would have damaged the party. This is the best way.

Q: Was your loyalty to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad ever shaken during your one-year wait?

A: I do not change my mind very easily, just as I take time to form an opinion. Once my opinion of a person is formed, I need new information and knowledge on the person for me to change my opinion of the person. I know the Prime Minister for a long time and I believe in him and his intentions. There was and there is no reason to be disloyal to him.

(Sanusi then quoted Albert Hubbard on Loyalty:

If you work for a man, in heaven's name work for him;
speak well of him and stand by the institution he represents
remember, an ounce of loyalty is worth a pound of cleverness
if you must growl, condemn and eternally find fault,
why, resign your position and when you are on the outside,
damn to your heart's content

but as long as you are a part of the institution
do not condemn it
if you do, the first high wind that comes along
will blow you away
and probably you will never know why.)

Q: What does Datuk Seri intend to do to unite Kedah Umno after the opposition to Datuk Seri shown by the Umno assemblymen before this?

A: I have no problems with the people of Kedah. The Kedah assemblymen have also expressed several times their support for YAB the Umno president. I was appointed by the president, so there is no problem about unity. Before I was made the Agriculture Minister, there were also heads of departments and agencies in the ministry who had a misconception of me. They received wrong information. When they came to know how I worked, they gave their full cooperation and realised the propaganda against me was a pack of lies.

Q: Datuk Seri, your name is not on the list of registrants for the Umno election in October, neither for the Supreme Council nor other posts. Can Datuk Seri comment?

A: I have been an appointed member of the Supreme Council, also an elected member; I have also been chairman of the Umno information committee, secretary-general of Umno and vice president of Umno. I found I felt the same in each of the posts I had held. Not contesting is not a big thing to me.

Q: Kedah also has serious youth problems, especially in industrial areas such as Kulim, Sungai Petani and Mergong. Many secondary school students have no interest to continue their education because jobs beckon to them in the factories. Apparently, their sole ambition is to work in factories and buy a motorcycle...

A: I will look into the matter.

Q: Kedah still has pondok schools which are truly shacks -- attap roofs and bamboo walls. Fires are often, causing hundreds of students to lose their schools and places of accommodation. Why do we, after 39 years of Merdeka, still have schools such as these? Why can't we build concrete and well-equipped pondok system schools?

A: I will study the situation in the pondok schools seriously. I will help them. I hope they will cooperate. I know all the tok guru and owners of pondok schools in Kedah and I will discuss with them and also the Ministry of Education. We will supply and upgrade the necessary facilities and equipment. The important thing is that the pondok schools must cooperate. -- BERNAMA

SJA CTL RM