

21/06/1997

From aliens to locals, Megat draws on past experience

Kang Siew Li

FOR the past 11 years, the mere mention of Datuk Seri Megat Junid Megat Ayob brought jitters to illegal foreigners in the country.

His name and "Ops Nyah" - the Immigrations Department's operations to reduce, if not eliminate, the number of illegal foreigners in the country - have been mentioned in the same breadth.

He was one of two deputies in the Home Ministry and probably the most high profiled, having led some of the operations by the Immigrations Department himself.

Now, Megat Junid heads the Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs after Datuk Abu Hassan Omar was appointed the Menteri Besar of Selangor.

Having spent a long time at the Home Ministry, it is not surprising therefore to see Megat Junid implementing in the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry some policies which he introduced at his former ministry.

"I have enjoyed working in the Home Ministry, making sure that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's Home Portfolio is being well looked after.

"I am sad to leave the ministry after some 11 years, but my new posting opens up new challenges," he said.

This full ministerial portfolio, however, will not take all his time because besides the Cabinet post, Megat Junid is also the member of parliament for Pasir Salak.

He got the first taste of politics in the early 1970s when he was studying at Universiti Malaya. During this time, Megat Junid met Dr Mahathir and they became fast friends.

"It was right after the May 13 incident in 1969 when there was a riot at the university. A group of political members and radical students questioned whether the Government led by the then Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman has addressed the concerns of Malaysia's rapidly growing rural society.

"As one of several student leaders, I provided Dr Mahathir a platform at the university to hold public forums where his views could be aired," he said.

Megat Junid was mesmerised by Dr Mahathir's leadership qualities.

"I had never planned to join any political party. After earning my arts degree at UM in 1972, I worked as a teacher at the Teluk Chengai English School in Alor Setar, Kedah for the next 10 years.

"During that period, Dr Mahathir and I continued our friendship. He was like an elder brother to me, with 17 years difference in age, and a man whom I truly admire," he said.

Later, Megat Junid was transferred to the Sultan Abdul Halim School in Jenan, Kedah where he taught for another three years.

It was only in 1975 that Megat Junid resigned his teaching post to join the ruling Umno party and became special assistant to Dr Mahathir, who was then the Education Minister.

The following year, he became the political secretary to Dr Mahathir, who was then the Deputy Prime Minister and Education Minister.

In 1982, Megat Junid contested for the first time the Pasir Salak parliamentary seat and won. He beat Encik Ahmad Abdul Majid of PAS with a majority of 10,524 votes.

In the 1995 general election, he beat Dr Mohd Rus Jaafar of PAS with a 17,115 vote-majority.

Megat Junid described his constituency as "a real traditional kampung", with a large part constituting of Malay villages.

The Perak river runs through the constituency and "I have the responsibility of looking after the people living at both sides of the river," he said.

Both Megat Junid and Perak Menteri Besar Tan Sri Ramli Ngah Talib came from the same area and this "gives us a strong inclination to develop the area."

Reminiscing the first time he became the people's representative for Pasir Salak, there were no tarred roads and electricity and water supplies in his own village, Kampung Padang. "If one were to visit my kampung then, it would have take them one-and-a-half hours to do so.

"Now, we have supplied the neighbouring villages with the necessary infrastructure ... roads, and electricity and water supplies. In fact, we also built two bridges across the Perak river - one near Teluk Intan and the other in Batu Gajah," he said.

Today, Megat Junid said he can travel around his constituency within 45 minutes. The jungle area located at the back of the Perak River, has also been turned into cocoa and palm oil plantations as well as paddy fields. Megat Junid has many plans for his constituency. Upper most on his mind is for the creation of modern living, incorporating traditional values, in Pasir Salak.

"We have to upgrade the people's way of living in Pasir Salak into using modern techniques particularly in farming, but that does not mean they have to change the way they live like in condominiums.

"We want them to maintain their traditional ways, alongside advanced technologies such as televisions and computers," he said.

On economic opportunities in Pasir Salak, he said his constituency has been having some difficulties in getting labourers for its plantations.

"We have been facing some problems in developing our traditional industries such as padi, palm oil and cocoa in recent years. That is why we have to go for modern techniques.

"To ease the tight labour situation, we also have to employ foreign workers to work at the plantations since many of our young people have migrated to bigger towns like Ipoh, Kampar and Batu Gajah to work in industries," he said.

He believed that the people are satisfied with the gradual developments in Pasir Salak. "One can see that there is a big change in the lifestyles of the people in Pasir Salak," he added.

Megat Junid visits his constituency every week or once a fortnight, depending on the functions he has to attend. "I make sure that my political secretary stays in Pasir Salak from Thursday to Sunday every week so that he can keep tabs on the going-ons and tackle any problems that arise.

Megat Junid's long-term plans for his constituency include promoting as many religious schools as possible in Pasir Salak for the young people "because I can see most of the social ills today result from a lack of religious knowledge.

"Besides government schools, we must also have religious schools to be managed by community leaders.

"On my side, I will try to give aid in terms of the infrastructure such as buildings and religious books because I feel that the young must at least have the basic religious knowledge to face the challenge of the modern world," he said. There are currently about 20 religious schools in Pasir Salak.

(END)