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New MB for Kedah (HL)

ALOR STAR, Sat. - As Tan Sri Sanusi Junid confirmed speculation that he would not continue as Menteri Besar of Kedah, Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon staved off an attempt to displace him as Penang Chief Minister.

This puts an end to rumblings over the top post in the two States.

While in Kedah, Sanusi's detractors wanted him out following Umno's dismal performance in the general election, in Penang, Koh's position was threatened by the resignation of two Gerakan State Assemblymen.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told reporters in Langkawi (see page 3) that he had yet to decide on who would be the next Kedah Menteri Besar.

Speculation is rife that possible candidates are Jitra Assemblyman Prof Datuk Dr Othman Ishak, Tanjong Seri Assemblyman Fadzil Hanafi and former Exco member and Kubang Rotan Assemblyman Syed Razak Syed Zain.

At a Press conference at his home, Sanusi said he was declining nomination for the post in the light of the general election results.

Calling it a "tactical retreat", the first-term Menteri Besar said Dr Mahathir had agreed with his decision to step down.

"After looking at the results of the election on the night of Nov 29, 1999, I have decided to decline any offer (to become the Menteri Besar) and will not continue my duties as Kedah Menteri Besar," he said.

A teary-eyed Sanusi, who refused a question-and-answer session with the Press, declined to talk about his replacement. He also refused to discuss his status in Umno or as Kuah State Assemblyman.

Reading from a three-page statement (full text on Page 2), Sanusi said he wrote to the Prime Minister on Nov 30 stating his intention not to continue as Menteri Besar.

"On Dec 2, about 7pm, I met the Prime Minister in Rumah Penghulu To' Senik in Langkawi and discussed matters pertaining to the post of Menteri Besar. After detailed discussions, the Prime Minister agreed to my wish not to serve as Menteri Besar.

"In making this decision, we were not influenced by outside opinion, whether they were whispered or published in some newspapers."

Sanusi said the announcement of his decision was delayed as it had initially been rejected by Barisan Nasional candidates who had requested that he delay announcing his decision until they had had a chance to meet the Prime Minister.

He said these candidates also condemned reports in a newspaper previously owned by a crony of former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

He stressed that of the new candidates he named to contest in the election, only one had lost.

Meanwhile, Koh said he received his letter of appointment from Dr Mahathir in Langkawi about three hours after the resignation of State Assemblymen Lim Chien Aun (Bayan Lepas) and Lim Boo Chang (Datuk Keramat) on Thursday.

Their resignation, and subsequent statement that they planned to join the MCA, triggered speculation that Koh might be dropped in favour of an MCA candidate.

Koh said he would call on Penang Yang di-Pertua Negeri Tun Hamdan Sheikh Tahir tomorrow to officially inform him of the appointment.

Koh will decide on the new Exco line-up within the next few days.

"I would like to thank the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister for their trust in me. I will continue to work with all BN component parties." Koh will be sworn in on Monday.

On Gerakan having the least number of seats compared to other BN components in Penang's 33-seat State Assembly now, Koh said he was given the Chief Minister's post based on the BN's spirit of power sharing.

"You must remember that in 1990, we lost our former Chief Minister Tun Dr Lim Chong Eu who was defeated by Lim Kit Siang (of the DAP). Then Umno had 12 seats whereas Gerakan had only seven. Despite this, the post was offered to me with support from the other BN component parties."

With the resignation of the two Lims, who will sit as independents, Gerakan has eight seats, Umno 10, and the MCA nine. The MIC, DAP, Pas and Keadilan have one each.