

05/11/2000

Adnan is one tough cookie

Shukor Rahman

THOSE meeting Pahang Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob for the first time will get the impression that this is one character you don't mess around with - and they would be dead right.

"Some have even called me a samseng (gangster)," says Adnan good humouredly when asked about his 'menacing' looks. But to those who know him, underneath the stern exterior is a heart of gold, for he is known to be quite generous to those in need.

But when it comes to work, Adnan is a hard taskmaster. He drives himself hard and expects others to follow suit. Some Exco members and assemblymen who do not measure up are known to have some trepidation when they are called up for a meeting.

Last December, at the swearing-in of State Assemblymen, he warned all State Exco members that their jobs depended on their performance.

"They must do well or risk being dropped. Anyone found not up to scratch will be dropped. I have no qualms about asking the Sultan to drop anyone from the Exco line-up," he said.

"I too can go tomorrow. There is a difference between politics and government administration. In politics, the ups and downs are normal."

Exco members and BN assemblymen are also required to submit monthly reports to him on the work they have done in their constituencies or under their portfolios. He also called on the people to provide him with feedback on the performance of assemblymen especially Exco members.

"I am a simple man. I am sincere, frank and forthright and I don't mince my words. I give respect when it is due," he said.

"But to the Opposition, especially Pas, you cannot show respect when they are very rude and have no respect for others, or when they try to be know-alls."

Adnan said he would respect Pas if its arguments were based on facts but the party had always preferred to twist facts and mislead the people.

"To us, Islam is a religion but to Pas leaders, their party is a religion. We must fight them when they twist facts in such a manner."

He cited another example when Pas claimed that reading Harakah is the same as reading the Quran as it also carried the hadis (sayings of the Prophet).

"This is their usual 'lawyer buruk' style of argument and we must be frank, rough and tough with them. We must know their game and what they are up to. They will try to show you up as incapable and the people will then reject you," he said.

That is why, he said, he was not keen on the proposed debate between Pas and Umno as the Opposition would try to twist facts to suit themselves.

Hard-hitting Adnan said he refused to apologise to Pas over the infamous rude hand gesture during the Sanggang by-election as it was 'a mere reaction to the same kind of thing they showed me'.

"The Sanggang victory is a sign that the people accepted me and the Barisan Nasional. Even when we won by 400 votes, it was still a victory to us in view of the tense situation," he said.

He was also grateful to Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Information Minister Tan Seri Khalil Yaakob, and Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak for helping out in the campaign.

The loss of eight state seats to the Opposition in the 1999 election still rankles Adnan.

"We have provided all the basic infrastructure - water, power and roads - yet we still lost so many seats because our traditional supporters gave their votes to the Opposition," he said.

He blamed the Opposition for its 'campaign of hatred' which targeted Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the respective Mentris Besar.

"We must now work to win the people's hearts and minds. We must 'turun padang' (go down to the ground) not to play golf but to meet the people, help to solve their problems and carry out projects where everybody can take part," he said.

In this respect, Adnan encourages 'gotong royong' projects and would even take to the field for a game of football with the younger generation.

"What the Opposition is doing today is what Umno used to do before complacency set in and we began to take things for granted. Others took over and we lost."

Adnan feels that the younger generation has too much free time on their hands while there is a dearth of leaders to guide them. As such, he said, youth organisations and leaders must play their roles.

How does the younger generation relate to Umno? "From what I can see when we meet the people, they are with us. Insya Allah (God willing) we can win them back for Umno," he said.

His vision for Pahang is to see Malay unity as well as unity among the various races, to ensure a balanced development and to promote IT literacy for the people especially the rural community.

"The various races should remain as united as ever as without peace and solidarity, we cannot guarantee a safe place for our future generation," he said.

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