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Fadzil Noor - highly respected leader with a moderate outlook

TO many people, Opposition leader Datuk Fadzil Mohd Noor, who died yesterday at the age of 65, was a simple person with a moderate outlook.

But fellow politicians, especially leaders of the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition, found him to be more than just that. He was firm, a man of principle, and a highly respected leader.

His passing is mourned not only by family members and friends but also members and supporters of Pas, the political party he led since 1989, as well as friends in other Opposition parties and the ruling party, Barisan Nasional.

Having cordial relations with the leader of Umno and Pas' archrival, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, speaks volumes about the two leaders' aspirations for Malays and Muslims.

This was proved when both shared a common stage at the Syarahan Perdana last month to address the issue of Palestine that was jointly organised by the Malaysian Muslim Youth Movement (Abim) and Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

Former Umno secretary-general and former Kedah Menteri Besar, Tan Sri Sanusi Junid, whose friendship with Fadzil went back to their Abim days in the early 1970s, said both leaders shared similar views on international Muslim unity.

"My long friendship with Fadzil was also intact despite us having different political ideologies," he said.

It was also during Sanusi's tenure as Kedah Menteri Besar that Fadzil received the Dato' Setia DiRaja Kedah (DSDK) from the Sultan of Kedah in 1998.

Fadzil's humble ways endeared him to the people. Many still called him Ustaz Fadzil even after he received his datukship.

Arriving at political ceramahs riding pillion on a motorcycle, stopping at coffee shops and stalls for a cup of sugarless "teh-o" were some examples of how down-to-earth he was.

The doors of his semi-wooden house in Kampung Borhan in Jalan Langgar, Alor Star was always open to people seeking his help or views on religious matters.

Fadzil @ Md Ali was born on March 13, 1937, to a religious family in Kampung Seberang Pumpung, Alor Star, Kedah.

A product of Maktab Mahmud, a school renowned for producing ulama in Kedah, Fadzil began his secondary education at the Derga Malay School in 1946 before continuing his tertiary education at the college.

In 1963, he was awarded a State scholarship to study at the University Al-Azhar in Egypt. He read Syariah Law (Islamic law), graduating with a bachelor's degree in 1967.

Upon his return to Malaysia the same year, he taught at his old school, Maktab Mahmud, and later became a lecturer in Islamic education at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (1973-1978).

Fadzil was sacked from the university for his involvement in politics. However, his sacking was deemed unlawful by the courts and he was re-instated. He resigned a few months later to become a full-time politician with Pas.

His political career in Pas started after he returned from Egypt. Given his leadership qualities, he was appointed Kuala Kedah Pas division chief and a member of the Kedah Pas liaison committee.

Fadzil was elected Pas national vice-president in 1981, holding the post

until 1983 when he was elected the party's deputy president.

He became acting president in October 1988 when then party president Yusof Rawa was undergoing medical treatment. Yusof stepped down because of poor health.

Fadzil first contested the Kuala Kedah parliamentary seat, as well as the Alor Merah State seat, on a Pas ticket in 1978 but lost.

In 1980, he contested the Bukit Raya State seat in a by-election and won.

In 1999, he won both the Anak Bukit State and Pendang parliamentary seats that he contested.

Fadzil was active in Abim where he was president from 1974 to 1978. He was also a Malaysia Muslim Scholars Association secretary-general in 1974.

The soft-spoken Fadzil was married to Khadijah Ibrahim. They have eight children - Huda, Ammar, Aiman, Muna'Izzah, Muhamad Faiz, Salwa, Ahmad Fauwaz and Ahmad Anas.

It is a great loss indeed for Pas, especially in facing the coming general election. However, party leaders are comforted by the fact that Fadzil had given his life to the party struggle.

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