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Moggie-Retirement

MALAYSIA'S LONGEST SERVING MINISTER CALLS IT A DAY

By: Azman Ujang

KUALA LUMPUR, March 26 (Bernama) -- When the new Cabinet line-up is announced tomorrow, one name which has been a permanent fixture for the last 25 years under three prime ministers will not be on the list -- Datuk Amar Leo Moggie.

Moggie stepped down as president of Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak (PBDS) last year and did not contest Sunday's general election, marking the end of an era for Malaysia's longest serving Cabinet minister.

When he was plucked out of relative obscurity in 1978 to join the Cabinet of then prime minister Tun Hussein Onn, Moggie, who hails from a far-flung longhouse in Sarawak's Kanowit district, became the youngest minister at 37 years old.

" When I first joined the Cabinet in 1978 I was the youngest at 37. Now 25 years later I am one of the oldest. Certainly I leave with mixed feelings but I have enjoyed my time in the Cabinet," said the outgoing Minister of Energy, Communication and Multimedia in an interview with Bernama.

Moggie is the only minister in the outgoing Cabinet to have served under three prime ministers, three years under Hussein, 22 years under Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the last five months under Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Asked to describe his three bosses, he said: " Obviously each person has slightly different style of doing things. The three prime ministers have been men of sterling qualities and have been very dedicated to their jobs".

" Tun Hussein was a very good and nice boss to work for, Dr Mahathir is a visionary and very inspiring leader, so you can understand why it is very important for you to keep pace with what's going on otherwise you

would be
unable to make any contributions to his government.

" Datuk Seri Abdullah is a very caring and humble personality, again slightly different personality but the common factor for these leaders is that they are dedicated to this country, to make sure this country progress so well, to make sure the various races and communities mix and get along with each other so well. I think this country has been very privileged and very lucky to have leadership of this calibre," he said.

Moggie said he felt "very comfortable" with Abdullah as prime minister.

" I'm sure the general population is also very comfortable. You can see that by the response he gets, by the reception he gets from the ordinary man in the street, the ordinary man in the kampung (village), the concern of the ordinary man is very uppermost in his presentation and this is very good and I hope that we all give him the full backing so that he can proceed with the programmes he has put in place", he said of Abdullah who has just led the Barisan Nasional to a massive victory in the general election.

Throughout his tenure in the Cabinet, Moggie was posted to only two ministries, both of which he has served twice, swapping places with Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, the Works Minister.

They are the Ministry of Works and the Ministry of Energy, Communication and Multi Media, formerly known as Ministry of Energy, Telecommunications and Posts. Moggie is well-liked by the energy sector and telecommunication industry for his inspiring leadership and for having a very good grasp of the issues at hand, a point which also endears him to the media.

Asked on this, he said dealing with the communications industry these days required him to be always on his toes because the issues were becoming more complicated with the rapidly changing technology.

" When we deal with communications industry now particularly in this modern phase, it's much more complicated, you are dealing both in service

sector and also you are dealing a lot with international trade issues. You are dealing a lot on technology issues and these are issues which are not that easy to keep up to date with.

" I know I find that I have to make sure that I keep track of what is happening globally on this type of technology. I have fortunately some very good young advisers in the ministry who read for me and they give me summary on a daily basis the trends of technology growth and that's how I'm able to at least appreciate a little bit on what is happening worldwide," he said.

As he put it: " Obviously it would be very difficult for me if I were not to have that kind of support from the various staff structure I have".

" And again I find in my 25 years in the federal government, I have always had very good relations with the staff that are in the ministry. I hope they share the same perception when they look at me as I certainly feel the same way in dealing with them".

Moggie said when he started out in the Cabinet, the issues in the communications industry and the technology were much simpler but now the industry was moving very, very quickly.

" The trends of technology change very, very quickly, so one needs to keep track of it to be able to follow what goes on. Similarly with regards to the electricity industry, there's been some changes in it the last 25 years," he said.

But Moggie said while Malaysia had progressed to attain first world standard in some of its infrastructures like highways and telecommunications, Malaysians still have a long way to go in achieving first world maintenance culture.

" Obviously if you look around there's still a lot to be desired in achieving that. It's a challenge to us as people of this country, for instance thinks like public toilets," he said.

He said while building good quality infrastructure was important, Malaysians must learn that it was equally important to make sure that they

were used well, maintain well and operate well.

"Otherwise they are not giving you the good quality that you expect.

yes, I think there's still a lot that needs to be done in this country," he said.

By the same token, while Malaysia's highways like the North-South highway was the nation's pride, people running the highway must know how to prevent things like the collapse of slopes that could cause greater damage as sections of the highway had to be closed for months, he said in citing another example of the maintenance culture of Malaysians.

He was also asked about his post-retirement plans and whether he plans to return to Sarawak after 25 years making Kuala Lumpur his home.

" I have no definite plans in terms what to do after I retire. But of course, very likely I'll be spending more time in Kuala Lumpur than in Sarawak. Obviously Sarawak will always be home, I still maintain a longhouse in Sarawak, our family home in the longhouse.

" When I think of Sarawak as home, that's home to me (longhouse) because I don't have other place in Sarawak other than the longhouse. Home is longhouse. Of course I'm a little bit older now, staying in the longhouse might be a little bit difficult for me at my age. But if I were to think of home that's where I go".

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