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All out to serve

Sofianni Subki; Faridul Anwar Farinordin

WHAT'S it like to be on the go almost non-stop during this campaigning period? It's punishing, hazardous and gratifying, as SOFIANNI SUBKI and FARIDUL ANWAR FARINORDIN find out from three politicians.

THESE days, Seputeh MCA bureau chief Chin Yen Foo's diary reads like that of a celebrity on a promo tour. There's a visit to Pearl Point Shopping Centre, Jalan Klang Lama at 1pm, followed by a meeting with a religious society at a temple at 5pm. By 7.30pm, he is expected to meet folks at a pasar malam in Taman Sungei Besi. The last item on his schedule is at 10pm - at mamak stalls Anand's Corner and Kevan's Corner.

He has more places to go the following day and the day after, right until polling day on March 21. Understandably, being the nominated Barisan Nasional candidate for Seputeh (P122) parliamentary seat, Chin wants to ensure that he meets his constituents face-to-face.

"My schedule is from 7am to midnight, non-stop. I meet people in shopping malls, temples, food stalls and markets. We're talking about area to area, house to house, pasar malam, pasar pagi and NGOs. We're targeting grassroot level with a personal touch," said the 44-year-old MCA Youth Seputeh deputy chief who's contesting for the first time.

"As a new face in the general election, I understand that I have a huge task ahead and I am thankful for the support. What's important is for me to carry out my duties sincerely and I aim at establishing a strong rapport with the people in Seputeh.

"My objective is to be a leader with the Mesra Rakyat quality. My campaign slogan is quite straightforward: All Out to Serve You."

While carrying out his duties, Chin says, he doesn't like to stop - even to have a proper meal.

"I prefer to just grab a sandwich and eat it on the move. I don't normally take breakfast, but my wife prepares ginseng tea which I have been taking for the last two weeks to boost my energy and help me stay fresh."

Chin said campaign meetings with party members are held twice a day, one in the morning and one at night "to make sure that we are informed of the day-to-day developments and to address matters.

"My handphone never stops ringing because there will always be updates from the bilik gerakan to inform about situations that require urgent attention, but I try not to have too many meetings as I'd rather be on the road with the people."

With the campaign gradually intensifying as polling day draws closer, Chin says he only goes to bed between 2am and 3am every night.

"In the last few nights, I only sleep for three or four hours. Every morning I wake up at 6.30am no matter what time I had come home the night before. I fall asleep quite easily. Nothing keeps me awake at night because I know I have a lot to do the following day."

Chin holds a Masters degree in Business Administration from the University of Surrey, Britain. Also a director of a company, the IT-savvy father of two joined MCA in 1998 and helped set up computers for the party during the last general election.

"People know me as a calm person. I guess it's an in-born quality. I believe the reason why I still look young even though I am in my 40s is because I like to smile a lot," he says with a laugh.

For Kelantan-born Datuk Dusuki Ahmad, 60, former political secretary to

former Prime Minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, and MP for Tumpat, the campaigning period is the time where candidates face extreme physical and mental challenges.

A committee member of Umno Tumpat under the Wakaf Baru State Constituency and head of the Kubang Batang Umno branch, he began his career in politics in the late 1960s after returning from Cairo's Al-Azhar University in 1966. Consequently, he contested in the 1969 general election but lost to Pas.

"At that time, people especially in the rural areas, still lacked basic amenities such as water and electricity. Since we had to use dirt roads, reaching out to the folks in even one kampung took a lot of time. Then, we spent the whole day with them - ate and prayed together and slept there. We only returned home the following day."

Dusuki, who won the Tumpat parliamentary seat in 1982 and was made parliamentary secretary to the Land and Regional Development Ministry in 1984 (two years later, he was made Information Ministry's parliamentary secretary), explained the only effective campaign method back then was through direct interaction.

"Many of the kampung folks hadn't seen TV or radio and most of them were illiterate, so we could only conduct our campaigns from kampung to kampung. I also wrote an eight-page pamphlet called Pelopor in Jawi on Umno so that the people had a better idea of the party.

This, he says, was important because Pas was using religion as a platform to condemn the Government, notably by calling Umno members kafir (infidels) and the Government taghut (contrary to Islam).

"As a result, our visits to the kampungs were not always well received. There were times when only 10 people attended our ceramah. The most unforgettable experience for me was when we found newly felled timber scattered on the road to obstruct our journey."

He also recalled a malevolent incident that happened to another party member during his ceramah in one of the kampungs.

"During his speech, grasshoppers that were contained in a jar filled with faeces were released through small openings of the raised wooden floor," he said in an interview at his home in Petaling Jaya.

However, despite the ill-treatment, Dusuki said none of the party members were disheartened.

"We had faith in the party and nothing could dampen our spirits. Even when only 10 people attended our ceramah, we were thankful. My best moments during campaigning was when people actually listened to what we said and showed interest in our party. That's what really matters."

He said one of the strongest campaigners was Tan Sri Hussein Ahmad (former Umno information chief and Tanah Merah Umno branch head) who carried out his duties in an old Fiat "but he was always happy".

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