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A bigger stage for politically savvy, well-known strategist

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RURAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT MINISTER

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - As a strategist, Datuk Aziz Shamsuddin's skills are well-known: in 2000, he negotiated with the Abu Sayyaf rebel group when they abducted 21 tourists from an island resort in Sipadan.

His experience as political secretary to the country's fourth Prime Minister for over 15 years has obviously helped.

And for all this and more, Aziz was named Rural and Regional Development Minister.

The teacher from Gopeng, Perak, started off in 1975 as special assistant to then Prime Minister Tun Hussein Onn.

In the early 80s, he became Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's political secretary.

Aziz was appointed a Senator in the Dewan Negara in 1999 and was given the promising position of Deputy Education Minister which he held till early this year.

A father of four, Aziz endeared himself to schoolchildren when he was Deputy Education Minister. He never talked down to students, preferring to communicate in a friendly manner wherever he went.

In 1999, he and his wife were involved in an accident along the North-South Expressway near Rawang. Aziz's wife, Datin Asmah Ali Hussain, died while he sustained severe injuries.

In the 11th general election, Aziz stood for the Shah Alam parliamentary seat which he won with a majority of 13,410 votes against his opponent Khalid Abdul Samad of Pas.

Aziz is currently Umno supreme council member after he obtained 1,263 votes to emerge ninth among 63 contenders for the 25 positions on the council.