

Passing of a Patriot: House pays tribute to Ghafar

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KUALA LUMPUR: Tun Abdul Ghafar Baba, the longest-serving elected representative the country has ever known, was given a rousing tribute on his home turf yesterday — the Dewan Rakyat.

A day after his death, a motion of condolence was tabled in the House by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, seconded by his deputy Datuk Seri Najib Razak and supported by many members, all of whom heaped praise on a man who had been MP since the first federal legislative council elections in 1955. Those who spoke included Opposition leader Lim Kit Siang and Pas Youth chief Salehuddin Ayob.

The motion was unanimously approved. The Dewan Rakyat also observed a minute's silence when it began proceedings yesterday. Abdullah said Malaysia had lost a national hero who had contributed immensely to the nation's development.

"He was a mature leader, constantly voicing his concerns and views, especially on religious, racial and cultural issues." For a Malay who came from a Malay village, he was broad-minded and could relate to anyone of all races and religions, Abdullah said.

Ghafar, 81, died of heart, lung and kidney complications at the Gleneagles Intan Medical Centre in Jalan Ampang on Sunday.

Abdullah said Ghafar's loyalty was to his struggle for the people, and he had always been consistent in serving the country, whether holding a position in the Government or party, or as an ordinary member without a post. He said Ghafar's qualities deserved emulation.

"The nation and the people have lost a statesman by the name of Abdul Ghafar bin Baba, who served as a member of this honourable Dewan for many years.

"Tun Ghafar's contributions and his service will always be cherished in the nation's history.

The Dewan extends its highest appreciation to the late Tun Ghafar for his contributions, good deeds, service and devotion to the nation and the people," he said.

The Prime Minister said the country and the people were also grateful to Ghafar's family for their sacrifices in allowing Ghafar to dedicate the greater part of his life to serving the nation and the people.

"On behalf of the Government and the people of Malaysia, I am extending my deepest condolences to the late Tun Ghafar's family.

"Our sadness and sympathies go out to his family members," he said.

'What elected representatives say'

AMONG those who paid tribute to Tun Abdul Ghafar Baba in the Dewan Rakyat yesterday were MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting, Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik, DAP chairman Lim Kit Siang, Pas Youth chief Salehudin Ayob, Datuk Dr Maximus Ongkili (on behalf of the people of Sabah), Datuk Peter Chin (on behalf of the people of Sarawak) and Umno veteran Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah.

Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting:

"He was known as a special, genuine and people-oriented leader. Throughout his political career and while he served the Government he was close to the people and was successful in solving various problems involving people of all races.

"He never forgot his humble beginnings. He was honest and sincere in what he did and was caring towards the poor and less fortunate. He was always accessible. There was no protocol and he always set aside his position as a Deputy Prime Minister whenever someone wanted to meet him. That was how close he was to the people."

Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik:

"Tun Ghafar was always there when called upon to settle disputes that threatened cracks in political parties. His experience, his caring attitude and impartiality in his judgment were always sought after in solving problems.

"In Gerakan, we always admired his nationalism and fighting spirit. His passing will certainly leave an impression in our history."

Lim Kit Siang:

"Tun Ghafar had a most illustrious political career, rising not only to become the Deputy Prime Minister and Umno deputy president but also, for a short time, the president of MCA when the party was embroiled in a leadership tussle.

"His concern for corruption and money politics in his final years should be an inspiration for a genuine and all-out war under the Ninth Malaysia Plan.

"He stood out among all politicians in his steadfastness and commitment to be with the people when he declined all titles and honours offered to him in his four decades of active political life until after his political retirement.

"Even in his final years, despite his ailing health, he continued to be in the forefront in his concern for the welfare and future of the people and country.

"I rise here to give support to the Prime Minister's motion of condolence on the passing of one of the very few surviving giants of the struggle for independence."

Salehudin Ayob:

"I am not from the same political era as Tun Ghafar but I was told by many that he was a legend who lived a simple life. He never aspired to accumulate assets. He has proven that by being a normal and simple man, he can rise up the hierarchy of leadership until he became Deputy Prime Minister. He has also achieved a statesman's status."

Datuk Dr Maximus Ongkili:

"He was particularly instrumental in establishing close rapport between the State and Federal Government when he was the Deputy Prime Minister from 1986 to 1993. He was the bridge between the Federal Government and integration among the State Governments."

Datuk Peter Chin Fah Kui:

"He was known to be the leader who inspired efforts towards rural development and who genuinely worked towards eradicating poverty. Youngsters should emulate Ghafar's attitude of mixing with everyone regardless of race, religion or status."

Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah:

"From a teacher he became a leader. Without formal education, he mastered many skills and understood various situations.

"Once he chaired a Cabinet meeting for only 15 minutes. He said: 'I hope everyone understands all the papers submitted. Shall we all go back to work unless there is any question?'

"He had good sense of humour."

'Felda scheme to carry his name'

KUALA LUMPUR: To honour the late Tun Abdul Ghafar Baba for his contribution to the nation, a Felda scheme in Jasin is to be named after him.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak proposed that the Felda Kemendor/Air Kongkong in Jasin, where Ghafar was an MP for five terms, be renamed Felda Tun Ghafar. He was the Jasin MP from 1969 to 1999 and the MP for Batu Berendam from 1999 to 2004.

In seconding the motion of condolence to the family of Ghafar, Najib said the former deputy prime minister's love for the nation was deep.

"He will be remembered as a sincere freedom fighter, a dedicated party leader, a committed national leader and a highly esteemed statesman."

Najib said Ghafar, during his terms as MP, was appointed twice as the minister responsible for rural development especially to oversee the development and operations of Felda schemes.

He said Ghafar was a unique leader. "Who would have expected a golf caddie and a kerepek seller (in his younger days) to reach such a high level as the nation's Deputy Prime Minister?"

Najib said Ghafar was the epitome of undivided loyalty to his party because since he was young until the day he died he remained loyal to Umno.

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