

Najib explains why he won't challenge PM
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Deputy Prime Minister Najib Razak has finally answered the question which has been on the tip of every Malaysian's tongue.
MCPX

najib arms procurement defense 290307 najibHe said he would not challenge embattled Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi for Umno's top post because he is a "true party man".

"I have some options but I am a true party man. Transfer of power should be done in the most traditional way.

"Umno is at its lowest point today, (if there is a challenge) then Umno will be further weakened and won't be able to fight the next general election. I don't want to inherit the party to lead it to defeat."

Najib made the remarks in London during a function in Chatham House (below), a well-known think-tank on international issues.

The Umno deputy president also likened himself to British Prime Minister Gordon Brown - who before coming to power was known to have consistently undermined his boss Tony Blair - drawing laughter from the audience of mostly British businessmen and Malaysian students.

chatham house london 120608 02Najib also commented on former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad's description of him as a coward for failing to make a move on Abdullah.

"People can have their views. It's not about having courage or being a coward."

Najib, who is son of second prime minister Abdul Razak, described himself as a man with "core values".

Invoking his father's legacy, Najib added: "My father built up the party - I am a son who does not want to destroy the party."

Ministers are 'already underpaid'

Earlier during his one-hour speech, Najib had quoted free-market economist Adam Smith to argue that Malaysia's fuel subsidies had been inefficient.

He cited the example of local fishermen who got diesel at RM1 per litre as it was heavily subsidised by the government.

The levels of fish caught have stagnated while the use of diesel went up, lamented Najib.

He said the government's move to slash fuel subsidies was "the only sensible macro policy".

"In terms of the nation, we don't want to use oil wastefully," said Najib, who described last week's sharp fuel hike of around 40 percent as "politically painful" and "difficult".

Najib also explained that it was "important to educate the Malaysian public that the day of reckoning will come" as the country will become a net importer of oil in four years.

Later, during the question-and-answer session, he was asked to justify the much-criticised slashing of ministers' entertainment allowances by only 10 percent, and the curbing of their all-expenses paid holidays to countries in the Asean region.

Najib defended the move, saying that cabinet ministers were "already underpaid in Malaysia" relative to the private sector.

"Don't begrudge us for what we have," he pleaded.

Najib also defended the Internal Security Act, which allowed detention without trial, citing the legislation as a key weapon in the country's defence against global and regional terrorism.

However, in his speech he did not specifically name ISA, which he referred to as a "pre-emptive legislation" introduced by the British during the war against the communists.

"The caveat is that we don't abuse it."

Tea with Prince Andrew

prince andrew 120608The deputy prime minister also revealed that he had tea with Prince Andrew - without scones - where the second son of Queen Elizabeth argued that peace in Afghanistan could be won if there were enough military resources devoted to the war.

Najib conceded that the March 8 general election results were a "watershed" for the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition, where it suffered its worst electoral setback in history.

He added that the results "were a very strong wake-up call".

Najib then ticked off de facto PKR leader Anwar Ibrahim for his "political gamesmanship".

According to him, the opposition leader had so far declared he was going to form government - in March, April and September.

"We are quietly confident that we can continue to be in office," he said.

Nevertheless, he sought to assure businessmen present at the talk that they need not think twice about investing in Malaysia.