

Najib sworn in as PM
Malaysiakini.com
April 3, 2008

Najib Abdul Razak takes the oath as Malaysia's sixth prime minister before the king this morning.

Dressed in black baju Melayu, he read his declaration of taking office and oath of secrecy before King Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin at 10.10am in Istana Negara.

"I, Najib Razak, who has been chosen to hold the post of prime minister, swear that I will carry out the responsibilities which I have been entrusted with to the best of my ability," the 55-year-old leader said in front of the king.

"I will be true to Malaysia and will defend and uphold the constitution."

The solemn ceremony, broadcast live on national television, was witnessed by Court of Appeal president Alauddin Mohd Sheriff. Chief Justice Zaki Azmi could not be present as he is overseas performing his 'umrah' (minor pilgrimage).

A religious official then read several verses from the Quran to pray for a successful leadership. [VIDEO | 5 min]

Also present were outgoing premier Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his wife, Jeanne.

Abdullah and Jeanne now 'Tun'

Immediately after Najib was sworn in as PM, the king conferred the highest government honorific title 'Tun' to both Abdullah and his wife.

Earlier, Najib and his wife Rosmah Mansor arrived at the palace at 10am. He was followed by Abdullah at 10.02am. Three minutes later, Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin and his consort Tuanku Nur Zahirah arrived in Istana Negara.

Among the dignitaries present included former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad - the man who partly contributed to Abdullah's early downfall - and all other top leaders on BN component parties.

Later, Prime Minister Najib attended Friday prayers at the National Mosque at 2pm and paid his respects at his father's tomb adjacent to the mosque. His father, Abdul Razak Hussein, was the country's second prime minister.

Ceremony at PM's Department

Abdullah officially handed over duties to Najib in a ceremony at the Prime Minister's Office in Putrajaya at 4.50pm.

The handing-over ceremony took place at the fifth floor of the huge complex.

At the ceremony, Abdullah, 70, attired in an orange baju Melayu, handed Najib the prime

minister's blue desk folder to signify the official handing over of his duties and responsibilities.

Najib, 55, was dressed in a pink baju Melayu at the event, which was witnessed by chief secretary to the government Mohd Sidek Hassan.

putrajaya pm office 030409 04After the handing-over ceremony, a calm and relaxed Abdullah and his wife shook hands with ministers, deputy ministers and senior government officers who were waiting at the lobby of the Prime Minister's Office.

They also shook hands with the staff at the Prime Minister's Office who had lined up from the main entrance of the building to Abdullah's car to see the couple off.

With Najib and Rosmah accompanying the former PM and former First Lady to the car, Abdullah waved a final goodbye before leaving the premises at 5.25pm.

Najib will be attending a 'tahlil' prayer session at his residence in Kuala Lumpur at 7pm.

He will then address the nation at 8.10pm. His speech is to be telecast live on national television.

Pak Lak an effective leader

Najib's accession to the country's top post completes a transition triggered by the general elections last year that saw the ruling Umno put in its worst-ever performance.

Abdullah tendered his resignation yesterday, after agreeing several months ago to step down in the fallout from polls that transformed Malaysia's political landscape.

Abdullah spent an unremarkable six years in office, during which he initially pledged extensive reforms including tackling corruption, which is endemic in the ruling party and society at large.

However, he was punished at the ballot box for not making good on his promises, and was widely criticised as a weak and ineffective leader.

Najib became president of Umno last week at the party's annual assembly, which was dominated by debate on how to overhaul the party and reclaim the support of voters.

According to political tradition, the party leader takes on the country's premiership, at the head of the Umno-led BN coalition.

Najib, who is son and nephew of two former prime ministers, has said he will focus uniting the multiracial nation, after ethnic minorities shifted to the opposition in the 2008 polls.

Need to clear the air on scandals

He also faces the challenge of cushioning the country's economy from the impact of the global economic crisis, which has seen the loss of more than 26,000 jobs here since the beginning of the year.

Earlier this month, Najib, who is also finance minister, unveiled a stimulus package worth RM60 billion but has warned the country's export-driven economy could shrink by 1.0 percent this year despite the massive spending.

However, analysts say that before Najib can begin to tackle these issues, he must first clear the air over opposition allegations connecting him to the 2006 slaying of the mistress of his close aide - a Mongolian woman whose body was blown up with military-grade explosives.

He has also angrily rejected allegations of corruption, and that his administration will adopt hardline tactics including detention of its opponents under tough internal security laws.

In a bid to win back support, Najib has pledged to "develop a government that respects the voices of all Malaysians.

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/101570>