

Najib: PM has support at every level of Umno

• By Ridzwan Abdullah

SEREMBAN: Support for Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi among Umno members has never been stronger, said the party's number two leader.

Datuk Seri Najib Razak said that the overwhelming support cut across all levels in the party, from the grassroots to the top leadership.

"We are not supporting the Prime Minister because we have to. We are supporting him because we want to," he said after opening the Rembau Umno division delegates meeting here yesterday.

Over the past few months, Abdullah's policies and decisions have been attacked by several parties, with former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad emerging as his most vocal critic.

Najib said Umno members were strongly behind Abdullah because they were confident of his leadership and his plans for the nation.

For that reason alone, he said the Prime Minister deserved unequivocal support.

Najib was confident he was speaking for the majority of Umno members as well.

"Yes, there may be some individuals who are not happy with Pak Lah for some reason or other, but that is politics"

He said Umno had already learnt painful but valuable lessons when the party was hit by crisis in 1987 and 1999.

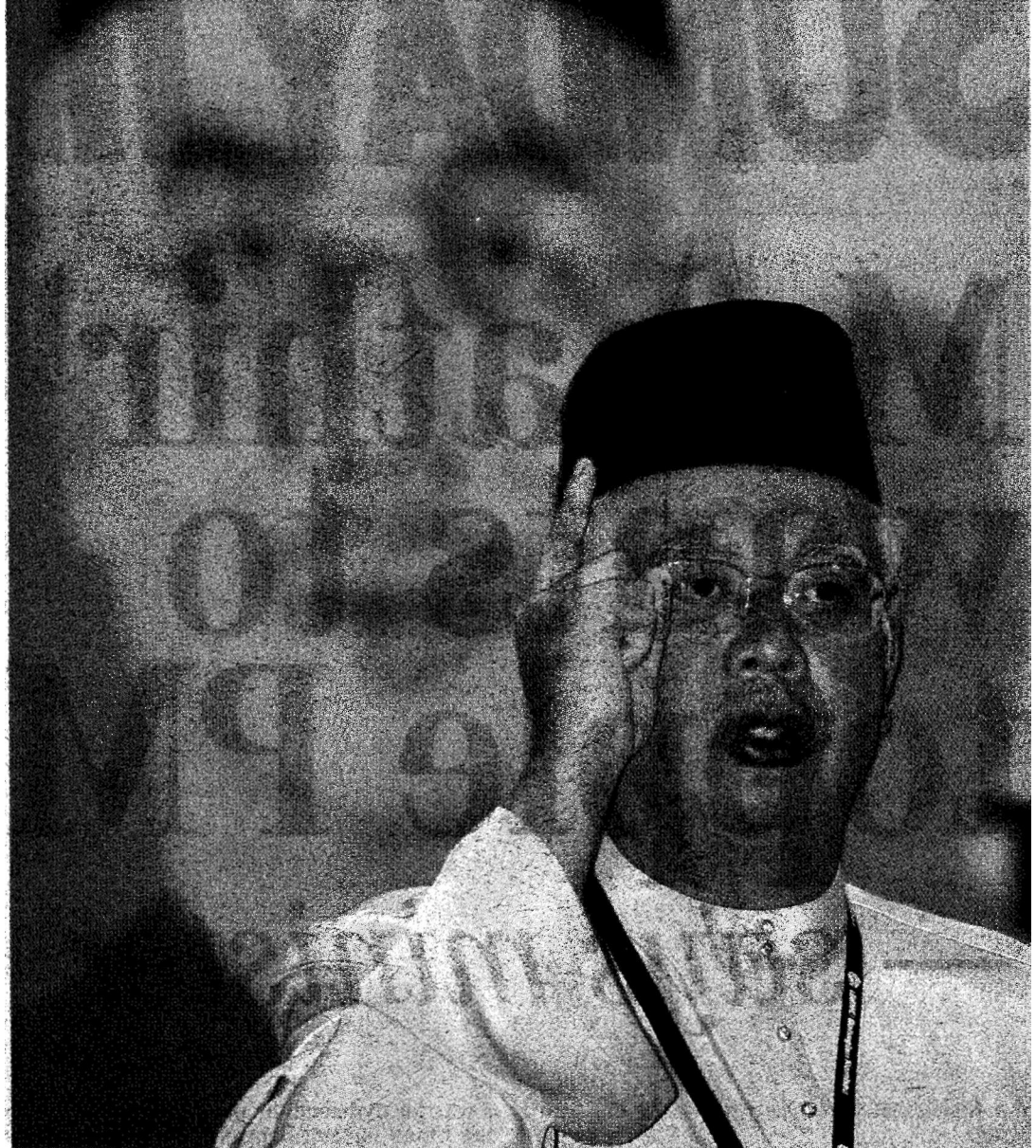
But the situation was different now as the party was solidly behind Abdullah.

"I cannot see Umno being disunited in a similar way now, not for these reasons."

Najib added that what was important was that Umno remained a strong and unified entity.

Addressing the delegates earlier, Najib explained the issues surrounding the decision to abort the plan to build a crooked bridge to Singapore.

For a start, he noted, Malaysia did not offer to sell sand to Singapore as part of the negotiations to build the bridge.



Najib giving his speech at the Rembau Umno division delegates meeting yesterday.

The proposal to sell sand was raised by Singapore, a fact confirmed by Malaysia's High Commissioner.

Najib said that matter, as well as the use of Malaysian airspace, had been raised at the officers' level meeting with Singapore.

Eventually, when the matter was conveyed to Abdullah and presented at the Cabinet meeting, a decision was taken that neither

demand could be accepted by the Malaysian Government.

"When we said we wanted to build a bridge, they said there must be reciprocity.

"So there was a proposal from Singapore requesting the use of airspace and they wanted sand to continue with their projects. So where is the Government's weakness on the issue?"

The Deputy Prime Minister said

he had also informed Abdullah that care must be taken in handling the issue because if the sand sold by Malaysia is used to double the size of Singapore island, it would be a major political blow to Umno and the Government.

On the issue of airspace, he said although it did not have that much effect on national security, it had become a political issue and was affecting the local population.