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Visionary leader for all Malaysians

• By Fauziah Ismail

HIS lifelong dream is for a united, peaceful and prosperous Malaysia, with abundant opportunities for all citizens.

But Datuk Seri Najib Razak takes over as prime minister at a time when Umno, of which he is the president, and Barisan Nasional, which he chairs, are at their weakest, having lost five states in the 12th general election and an economy at its worst in history.

"I am aware that I will take over the party and BN at a most challenging time, both politically and economically. Yes, this is the most critical (time) in the history of Umno and BN. We have never gone through this before," he said in a recent interview, in acknowledgement of what he is faced with.

The country's sixth prime minister has signalled for reforms, be it in the party or government, to restore the people's confidence in the BN government.

"If we are not brave enough to change, we will be changed by the people. We need to make massive changes to the party and the government," he said.

Najib becomes the prime minister 39 years after his late father, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, was appointed to the same position in 1970.

As the son of Malaysia's second prime minister, Najib was born into politics. He grew up watching his father and knew the demands of mainstream politics.

It was his father's death in 1976 that thrust the polite, well-bred and somewhat shy 22-year-old into the political limelight.

Najib received his early education at St John's Institution and then later at Malvern Boys' College in Worcestershire, England before completing his tertiary education and obtaining a degree in Industrial Economics from Nottingham University.

He returned to Malaysia in 1970. In 1974 he joined Petronas as a manager of public affairs.

Following Razak's death, the Sultan of Pahang named Najib as Pahang's "Orang Kaya Indera Shahbandar". The overwhelming sentiment following Razak's death drove Umno Pekan to decide unanimously that Najib should contest in the by-election for the Pekan parliamentary seat, made vacant by his father's death.

On Feb 21, 1976, at 22 years of age and just five weeks after his father's death, Najib became the youngest member of parliament in Malaysian history. He won the seat uncontested.

Najib had gone on record in a number of interviews describing how he felt at that time, that he had been suddenly "thrown into



Datuk Seri Najib Razak taking his oath of office as the deputy prime minister before Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Syed Putra Jamalullail.

the deep end of the pool" and had to quickly learn to "sink or swim".

But the fierce determination and drive to perform surfaced quickly as he always knew that at some point in his life, he wanted to serve his community and country.

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE



Datuk Seri Najib Razak returns to a hero's welcome in Kuantan after his appointment as the deputy prime minister.



WEAKNESSES MUST BE ADDRESSED WHEREAS STRENGTHS SHOULD BE FURTHER AMPLIFIED. IF WE DO NOT UNDERTAKE THIS PROCESS, UMNO WILL CONTINUE TO BE SEEN AS A PARTY STILL IN DENIAL.

— SPEAKING AT THE JOINT OPENING OF THE 2009 UMNO YOUTH, WANITA AND PUTERI DELEGATES' CONFERENCE.



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