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TAKING CHARGE DURING TOUGH TIMES

Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak takes over as captain of the nation when the seas are choppy and the weather stormy, but being a decisive and effective leader, he should be given a chance to prove his mettle.

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DATUK Seri Najib Tun Razak was the eldest son chosen to carry the family flag to the political arena after the untimely death of his father Tun Abdul Razak, the revered second Prime Minister.

He was only 23 when he became the Member of Parliament for Pekan and 32 when he became a Minister.

Today three decades later and still young at 56, Najib takes over from Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as the country's sixth Prime Minister.

It is a time of great challenge with the country facing, like the rest of the world, probably its worst ever economic downturn with deep political divisions and racial and religious issues compounding the problems.

Other Prime Ministers have faced momentous challenges in their reigns - the communist insurgency, confrontation, the May 13 race riots - but none had to take office in the midst of a storm as Najib has.

He might not be extremely charismatic or an impressive orator but he brings with him three decades of experience in government to the job.

He might seem plodding and colourless but insiders say he has a sharp mind, can

easily grasp complex issues and understands the bureaucracy like no other leader before.

"He would bring decisiveness and intellectual vigour to the job," said political scientist Dr Denison Jayasooria.

"But he has a credibility problem that he needs to address and the negative perception that goes with it."

Dr Denison said Najib has one big job ahead - winning the hearts and minds of the people but has suffered setbacks for his role in the collapse of the Pakatan Rakyat government in Perak.

"We have confidence in his capacity to handle complex issues, he can manage very well but does he have the political will to act decisively?" asked Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam, chairman of Transparency International, Malaysia.

"It is decisiveness and the political will that counts," he said. "We have to see how he performs in the first 100 days."

"His first step should be to recognise that we are all Malaysians, adhere to the Constitution faithfully and treat all citizens equally and fairly," Navaratnam said.

"He should treat the NEP not as a race-based policy but as a justice-based one so all the have-nots can benefit irrespective of race," he said.

Political scientist Dr Chandra Muzafar says he would like to see the positive



New saga: Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak taking a look at the Proton Saga model to be used by taxi drivers on Jan 22. The way he has handled financial matters so far has instilled much confidence among Malaysians.

side of Najib as a Prime Minister.

"Every person should be given a chance to prove his worth. He is the most experienced person we have. He has a wealth of experience in administration and is a proven and effective decision maker," Dr Chandra said.

"He is well read and I suppose he also brings pedigree to the job," he added.

He said Najib takes office at a challenging time and in a tough environment - made difficult by the array of political opponents gathered against him.

"There are only accusations but not one iota of evidence," Dr Chandra said. "His opponents should hold off. He should be given a chance to prove his mettle."

The Opposition however see the rise of Najib as Prime Minister as an ominous sign of danger ahead for Pakatan Rakyat. They say unlike Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who had a soft spot for the democratic opposition and was willing to play along, Najib, on the other hand, sees the opposition as opponents who have to be defeated.