

Newspaper	The Star
Date	3/4/2011

Stepping out of dad's shadow

Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak's swearing-in as the sixth Prime Minister is historic given who his father was, but he is very much his own man and is realistic about the economic and political challenges ahead.

ON an evening a little more than five years ago, relatives, friends and supporters had gathered at Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak's Taman Duta house for *tahlil* prayers.

It was a thanksgiving prayer for his appointment as Deputy Prime Minister earlier that morning.

He gave a soft, subdued speech after the prayers and the key points in his speech were commitment, loyalty and competence.

He said he would be steadfast to the Government and Prime Minister, and hard-working and committed in his duties. He was grateful for the role and thanked those who had stood by him through the years.

Commitment, loyalty and competence have been recurring themes in Najib's political journey.

It has been a long journey and he will arrive at his new destination today when he is sworn in as Malaysia's sixth Prime Minister.

Najib, 55, has come full circle in politics.

His political career began with the death of his father Tun Abdul Razak

Hussein in 1976. Today, in that sense, is particularly historic and meaningful — the son of a former Prime Minister becoming Prime Minister himself.

The handover of power this time has been in stark contrast to that five years ago when Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad passed the baton to Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. Back then, there was an outpouring of emotion for Dr Mahathir and goodwill for Abdullah.

There is no euphoria of any sort this time. The mood is sombre, with a sense of relief that the transition has been smooth and peaceful and with both the outgoing and incoming Prime Ministers showing great rectitude and patience throughout.

Najib is taking over in the face of challenges on both the economic and political fronts. The ruling coalition is labouring under a perception crisis as a result of an informed and critical electorate who want clean and capable leaders.

Unlike Abdullah who inherited a battleship in full steam, Najib is taking over a battered ship and this may



explain why he seems solemn and thoughtful rather than celebratory.

The last few months have been spent consolidating his position in Umno so that he will be a strong president who is truly in charge.

The Umno general assembly last week ended on a high note, demonstrating his determination to rebuild the party and recover lost ground. He did not get his dream team but he is surrounded by some very capable people whom he trusts and can rely on.

One of the most important points he made at the general assembly was that the party had to change.

The old doctrine of the party controlling the Government could no longer hold. Instead, to recover and survive, the party must listen to what the people want so that the party in power will form a

Government that reflects what the people want.

He also made a very significant visit to *Sin Chew Daily*, the most influential Chinese vernacular paper in the country. Some have even described his visit as symbolic given that it took place just days before his swearing-in.

Having put his own Umno house in order, he now wants to reach out to the next biggest community - the Chinese - to tell them that he will be an inclusive Prime Minister.

He wishes to cultivate the Chinese media, to signal that they are relevant to his administration. He wants to know what the Chinese are thinking and he also needs the community to understand what he wants to accomplish.

And he needs the cooperation of the Chinese business sector if he wants to see his economic policies succeed.

Najib impressed top editors and executives of the paper at a closed-door discussion.

"We asked him very tough questions and he impressed us with his

grasp of issues and perspective. This man knows his stuff. His challenge now is implementation," said *Sin Chew* executive director Rita Sim.

Najib is coming into this job with unrivalled experience in governance and politics. He has chaired numerous Cabinet committees and civil servants who have worked with him testify to his knowledge and commitment to the job.

The thing now is to get the job done.

He is not coming in making big promises or pumping up the people's expectations. Instead, he is fully informed of the challenges and he has ideas on how to tackle them.

His first major speech in a few days time will give everyone a clearer picture of his road map for the future.

Comparisons will be made with his father but the times of Tun Abdul Razak were so different it is almost a world away.

The new Prime Minister is stepping into office a very realistic but determined person, and also very much his own man.