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# 'I helped Najib become PM'

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**'I WAS LOYAL':** Dr M asked me to assume post, but I refused, says Muhyiddin

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**F**ORMER deputy prime minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin has revealed that he was instrumental in helping Datuk Seri Najib Razak assume the premiership in 2009.

Speaking during a dialogue in Johor Baru on Saturday, Muhyiddin said he had declined when asked by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad to succeed Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the then prime minister.

Muhyiddin said Barisan Nasional's poor performance in the 2008 general election (GE) had compelled him to urge Najib, who was then deputy prime minister, to take over the helm.

"I met Najib at his office and I asked him how he felt about the situation post-GE. He (Najib) shook

his head and said it was difficult.

"I said to him: 'That is why I came to see you. It is time for you to prepare and take over the country's leadership'," he said during the dialogue organised by publishing company Karangkraf and its daily, *Sinar Harian*.

Muhyiddin said he felt Najib was well-suited for the position of prime minister, given the latter's vast experience in politics.

"However, Najib took a long time to make up his mind," Muhyiddin said during the dialogue.

"That was when Dr Mahathir said I should go for the (Umno) presidency and that he would support me. But I said: 'No sir, I am only the party vice-president'."

He said he eventually convinced Najib to take up the challenge and vie for the Umno presidency.

"I told him (Najib) I had met with Dr Mahathir and that he asked me to

contest. Finally, he accepted my advice and went for the presidency. The rest is history."

Some 400 people, most of them Johor Umno members, attended the dialogue session at a hotel in Johor Baru.

Muhyiddin, during the dialogue session, made it clear that he did not regret asking Najib to take over as prime minister.

"Throughout my time as his deputy, I have never threatened Najib's position nor plotted to overthrow him.

"Do not question my loyalty because at the time, I did not see what his weaknesses and faults were."

Muhyiddin, who became deputy prime minister in 2009, was dismissed from his post during a cabinet reshuffle in July.

However, he remains Umno deputy president.

Meanwhile, Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Seri Salleh Said Keruak yesterday denied Muhyiddin's account, saying Najib had remained loyal to Abdullah.

"Maybe Muhyiddin forgot that

when Dr Mahathir was no longer the prime minister and began criticising Abdullah, it was Najib who publicly declared that his loyalty was with Abdullah.

"Muhyiddin, however, said and did nothing to defend Abdullah," Salleh said in a statement.

He said Najib's loyalty to Abdullah was exemplified by his refusal to betray the then prime minister.

"What Muhyiddin left out is that Najib did not want to betray Abdullah by going against him. Najib felt the deputy should be loyal to the No. 1.

"So it is not that Najib took a long time to make up his mind, but more that Najib did not want to oust the prime minister."

Muhyiddin, during the dialogue session, questioned why several Umno leaders had begun to sideline him after he openly questioned Najib over the 1Malaysia Development Bhd controversy.

"How does giving ammunition to the opposition to hit the party be considered good for the party?" Salleh said.

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**Datuk Seri Salleh Said Keruak**  
Communications and multimedia minister



"Muhyiddin complained that the prime minister was sidelining him and no longer giving him respect, and that he was no longer entrusted with the job of chairing certain meetings like in the past.

"Trust and respect need to be earned, not demanded, as the saying goes."