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'Strong leadership helped nation pull through'

KUALA LUMPUR; Malaysia's ability to not only survive the early challenges as an independent country but flourish and prosper was not a product of chance or luck, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

He said Malaysia pulled through because of its leadership and there were particular leadership traits that one could easily identify.

"Our past leaders had a deep care and concern for the nation, and their services went well beyond the call of duty. Their decisions were instinctive and came from genuine patriotism and a strong sense of purpose.

"They were willing to make big personal sacrifices," he said in his speech on "Leadership in Challenging Times" at the 26th Tunku Abdul Rahman Lecture organised by the Malaysian Institute of Management here.

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Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak

Najib said past leaders were also bold enough to take action regardless of whether it was popular or not.

This, he said, was exemplified by his father Tun Abdul Razak Hussein (Malaysia's second Prime Minister) who was known for firm action and little talk.

When matters required immediate action, winning people over took second place to responding with speed, he said.

"Tunku Abdul Rahman bore the burden of negotiating for an independent Federation of Malaya, emerging from the shackles of an empire and recovering from a communist insurgency.

"Tunku's prime challenge was to forge a new nation out of a society with little sense of unity or overall identity," said Najib.

He said his father had led alongside Tunku Abdul Rahman, at a time when Malaysian society was in deep crisis, plagued by ethnic divisions and festering tensions.

Tun Razak was not only able to prevent the almost-certain disintegration of society, but he put Malaysia on its path towards the rapid and widespread socio-economic development that was to fol-

low, he said.

He said both Tun Razak and his deputy, Tun Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman, died in office and worked to the end, although they both knew the extent of their illnesses.

"They fought for what was right, took difficult decisions and created radical policies - all from the most noble and moral motives," he said.

He described them as dynamic, saying: "I refer again to Tun Razak's introduction of the New Economic Policy in 1970, and its continued implementation by his successor Tun Hussein Onn.

"Wisdom and pragmatism were evident. We had leaders who saw beyond the short-term and created a framework that would build a more equitable and sustainable future, even though they knew it was not one they were likely to live long enough to see." - Bernama