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Najib speaks his mind in candid interview

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ALL of Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak's friends and supporters have spoken of how calm and collected he has been throughout the last one year despite being in the cross-hairs of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad. He sat down with WONG CHUN WAI and JOCELINE TAN for a breakfast interview on the eve of the Umno general assembly.

The fallout with Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin

We were okay, but the relationship was too formal. I think he felt he should have been more involved.

No need to call, I mean he could have come to see me as and when. Just walk into the office, surely I would see him.

Or drop by the house to say I need to discuss something with you. That's how we develop a relationship.

That should have been the practice.

I still enjoy a good relationship with Pak Lah. I never asked him about political funding when I was his deputy, that was the job of the party president since Tunku Abdul Rahman's time.

Muhyiddin doesn't understand this special relationship. This is how we keep strong as a party.

Your new Deputy Prime Minister

I think he is doing well. (Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad) Zahid and I go back a long way, a lot of history behind us. Zahid does a lot of things without being asked.

One evening during the Asean Summit, I was watching the rehearsal, he just turned up and said, I'm

here to just give you moral support.

That kind of relationship is important between two top leaders.

There must be trust and a level of comfort with one another.

IMDB rationalisation

I would say it is almost done. We are able to meet the deadline to implement the rationalisation programme in a very positive way.

The actual process will take a few more months because some of the agreements will take time, for the money to come in.

I think people understand that this is essentially a business issue and should not be over politicised.

You were not in Parliament to talk on IMDB

I decided that this is a business problem that became political.

When it became political, I thought it was timely to explain to the Umno delegates in a closed-door session.

Your interview by the MACC

You have to ask them. I gave whatever information I know. They went and met with the donors.

The most important thing is to ascertain that the money is not coming from IMDB. There are no specific laws relating to political funding.

Every political party, including the Opposition, requires political funding.

I suggested it four years ago, but it was shot down by the Opposition.

They didn't want it because some businessmen, seemingly friendly with BN, also buy "insurance policy" and contribute to the Opposition.

Nature of RM2.6bil donation

We are not the only ones. If they like you and the relationship is personal, it happens.

It is not on an institutional basis or party basis. It is personal, that's why they insisted it should be personal to me.

That was the wish of the donors, I didn't want to offend them. It went into my personal account, but not in the sense that I use it for everyday expenses.

Division chiefs were bought?

That is why they are upset with Tun (Dr) Mahathir. There were many police reports lodged against him.

The police called him for an interview not because he attended the Bersih rally, but because he alleged that division heads received millions.

Of course, he refused to answer most of the questions, he didn't have evidence.

If you don't have evidence, don't make allegations.

What does Tun Dr Mahathir really want?

It is simple, he wants a Prime Minister who listens to him.

If it is not IMDB, he will find something else. If he says he wants a crooked bridge, yes sir, I'll do a crooked bridge.

He doesn't like Singapore, you quarrel with Singapore. If he likes Africa, you go to Africa. This is (Dr) Mahathir.

But a Prime Minister has to do what he thinks is the correct thing. I knew I would incur his wrath and I was right.

Who has he not quarrelled with?

He quarrelled with every prime minister except Tun Razak because he did not last long.

Any chance of mending ties with Dr Mahathir?

It takes two to tango, that's all I want to say.

But to tango might not be the right word. It might be a wrestling match.

The issue of trust deficit

I am aware of it, I think issues have been exploited and made it worse with the advent of social media, of course.

There's the question of perception, half truths, but we have to deal with it.

We cannot clamp down on social media.

We have to accept the fact that the level of scrutiny now is higher than ever before and the burden is much higher for all politicians, not only in Malaysia, but all over the world.

You are slimmer

I've gone down. I'm a lot slimmer now than before. I don't take rice, I take quinoa and I exercise regularly. I had to adjust my suits by two and a half inches all round.

The funny thing about Malaysians, if you lose weight, they think you're sick. They will ask, are you all right?

And when you put on weight, they say you're looking well. It's a completely wrong assessment of a person's state of health.

I've never been fitter. I'm in fighting shape, so don't worry.