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'I have people's mandate'

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DETERMINED:

Najib says he will carry on as long as party and people support him

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DATUK Seri Najib Razak said yesterday he will not bow to pressure to resign as prime minister, insisting that he has the people's mandate and no one individual can it take away.

Firing a salvo at former prime minister-turned-critic Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad for the first time publicly, Najib told a 40,000-strong crowd here that he would carry on as long as the party and the people supported him.

"Obviously, one voice (Dr Mahathir) cannot be greater than the voices heard from the crowd here and in Kota Belud, and the mandate given by the people," he said, taking a swipe at Dr Mahathir.

Najib's strong rejoinder to Dr Mahathir's attacks on him and his administration could not have come at a better time, with Umno marking its 69th anniversary today and with Dr Mahathir helming it for 22 years.

Najib reminded the retired leader that when he was the prime minister, the nation and party supported him.

"We gave him our full support. Now that he is no longer PM, support us in return," he said to loud cheers from the crowd. •

In an upbeat note, Najib shouted "Rakyat Sabah sokong..." (the people of Sabah support...), which was met by replies of "Najib, Najib, Najib!" from the crowd.

Reaffirming his stance, he read out a Bugis proverb on never giving up, which narrated how a sailor who sought new pastures should not return until he completed his journey successfully' — pointing out that he had no plan to back down.

Najib's determination to take on Dr Mahathir and his detractors was greeted with cheers and applause from those attending the Solidarity Gathering with the People of Sabah at the end of his one-day state visit.

Najib said his ascension as prime minister and Umno president was based on the democratic process.

He said each leader, including himself and Dr Mahathir, would be tested in many ways during their tenure.

"Was he (Dr Mahathir) not tested? There was the test of Team A and Team B, (where Dr Mahathir) almost lost. More than 50 per cent of Umno members back then demanded his resignation.

"What was his reply? 'Even if I win by a single vote, I will continue to be the prime minister.' It was a great answer.

"In 1987, I was one of those who supported him. He remained PM because we (Umno members) were together, even in hardship.

"When he was faced with hardship, we gave our support to ensure that he stayed (in power).

"If we did not support him in his time of need, Dr Mahathir would

not have stayed on for 22 years as PM," he said.

"So, do not forget that when he was PM, we gave him our full support.

"Don't make noise even if you're not so supportive."

On Malaysia Development Bhd (IMDB), Najib countered Dr Mahathir, saying the government would find ways to manage and resolve the issue.

"He said IMDB lost RM42 billion. Then, he changed his mind and said IMDB owed RM42 billion. But, we (IMDB) have assets. We have ways to handle this. We will find ways to resolve this."

Najib said he was moved by the support of the people for him to continue to lead the nation.

"I feel touched. You can depend on me and I will stay on for you."