

Newspaper
Date

New Straits Times
21 February 2016

FEBRUARY 21, 2016

NEW SUNDAY TIMES

19

NEWS

Trusted aide of the Razak family

NST-21/2/2016

LOYAL: As aide-de-camp to second prime minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, Datuk Idris Shaari Mat Aris was very much a witness to the growth of Datuk Seri Najib Razak from a quiet teen to the consummate politician he is now, writes Tasnim Lokman



Datuk Idris Shaari Mat Aris (back row, second from right) with the Razak brothers (clockwise, from left): Datuk Mohamed Nazim, Datuk Seri Najib, Datuk Mohamed Nizam, Datuk Seri Nazir and Datuk Ahmad Johari. Pix by Mohamad Shahril Badri Saali

HE was only 22 when he was entrusted with a heavy responsibility — to be personal assistant to Malaysia's first deputy prime minister, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein.

Nervous though he was, the young police sergeant took it in stride and went on to serve not just Tun Razak, but his entire family for a good 44 years.

"I am blessed that I was able to serve a family that has given our country two prime ministers," said Datuk Idris Shaari Mat Aris, 67, recently.

It all began in 1965, when Idris was assigned as Tun Razak's aide-de-camp (ADC), a post he held until Razak died in office as prime minister in 1976.

Upon Tun Razak's death, the late prime minister's family asked Idris to retire from the force to become the personal aide of Tun Razak's widow, Toh Puan Rahah Noah, and help manage the family's affairs.

When Idris first joined the family, Datuk Seri Najib Razak was only 12.

"My duties included sending him to tuition classes, including French



They (the Razak brothers) were like good friends and had a lot of respect for their parents.

Datuk Idris Shaari Mat Aris
Aide-de-camp to second prime minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein
ADC

class. When he was 13, he was sent to London to further his studies," recalled Idris.

The Razak brothers, he said, were a disciplined lot and close-knit.

"They were like good friends and had a lot of respect for their parents."

One incident that remains etched in Idris' memory is when Najib returned from London for a holiday

during his final year in university.

Tun Razak had given Idris instructions to take the then 22-year-old Najib to Pekan (Tun Razak's constituency) to meet the villagers.

"We did not know what Tun Razak's intention was, but we did as instructed. We were in Pekan for two days and went to the ground to meet the people," he said, adding that they stayed in a small house that

belonged to Tun Razak.

Idris related several amusing incidents involving the young Najib.

"He was a bit of a scaredy-cat, and when we stayed at the old house in Pekan, he insisted that I sleep in the same bedroom with him. He slept on the bed while I slept on the floor," he said, his eyes brimming with laughter.

Idris recalled the first few years of Najib's tenure as Pekan member of parliament following Tun Razak's death.

As Najib was unexpectedly thrown into the political limelight, he did not have a political secretary. Toh Rahah requested that Idris accompany Najib and assist him whenever he visited the constituency.

Idris related another humorous incident during one of the visits.

Najib had been invited to officiate at a parent-teacher association meeting of a school there and was required to deliver a speech in Bahasa Malaysia.

"When he started to speak, I ran to the car. I was embarrassed because of his (English) accent. He was not fluent in Bahasa Malaysia.

"But then again, that was to be expected as he had been studying in England from a young age, and he and his siblings always conversed in English."

"But *Alhamdulillah*, he realised his weakness and made the effort to learn Bahasa Malaysia. He did not only master the language, but learnt to read and write in Jawi as well."

Idris said when Najib was appointed as defence minister in 1991, he advised the latter to be loyal to the country's top leadership, just as how Najib's father was to the then prime minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj.

"His father was loyal to Tunku, regardless of what happened. I told him, if we have *rezeki*, we too will be rewarded one day," he said, recalling that Tun Razak's compatriots had urged him to ask Tunku Abdul Rahman to step down as prime minister, but Tun Razak ignored them.

Asked about the current political scenario, where Najib has come under criticism over the RM2.6 billion donation issue, Idris said it was not like Najib to do such things.

"To me, he did not do it. What happens behind his back, I do not know. That is not Najib's personality or character."

Idris said he once asked Najib about the allegations, and the prime minister replied: "Idris, think about it. If I were to do something bad, would it not ruin my father's and my family's good name? I'm not willing to do that. It is all lies."

"Since then, I never asked him again," he added.

He recalled the time when Umno was divided into Team A (supporters of the then prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad) and Team B (led by former Umno vice-president Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah) in 1987.

He said Najib, who was the then Umno Youth chief, was initially in Team B. A few nights before the Umno General Assembly, Idris persuaded Najib to join Dr Mahathir's team.

"I sought Toh Rahah's advice and she agreed that Najib should support the party leadership."

Idris said it was past 8pm when he finally got to meet Najib and speak to him about showing up at a meeting held by Team A at the Hilton hotel.

"I begged him to go and told him his mum had also agreed. He took some time to think about it and told me to head there first."

"He said, 'don't worry, I will make it there', and so, I went. The hall was full of Umno members."

Idris said when Najib arrived, the crowd went wild, realising that they had the support of the Youth wing.

"If Najib had not given his support, Dr Mahathir could not have won, as Najib had the support of not only the youth, but many of the delegates from Pahang."

"This is why Dr Mahathir needs to say 'thank you' to Najib for opting to throw his support behind him at the very last minute. This is the real story of what happened that year."



Datuk Idris Shaari Mat Aris recounting his experience working with Datuk Seri Najib Razak and his family.