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'It began and blossomed in Pekan'

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NOSTALGIC TRIP: Najib has proven his political mettle

A JALIL HAMID

IT was no ordinary Pekan trip for Datuk Seri Najib Razak yesterday. Soon after his arrival, the prime minister declared: "It began and blossomed here in Pekan."

And tributes poured in as he spent the day marking the 40th year of his political journey with what he loves most — educating the young.

He was at the official launching of two universities in his Pekan constituency on the same day, and his message was almost similar — quality education is key.

The first major tribute came from the Tengku Mahkota of Pahang Tengku Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah.

"Ia adalah satu nostalgia besar maksudnya. Dulu, tak ada rambut putih. Sekarang, seluruh rambut dan keningnya total white, yang menunjukkan dia melalui banyak pengalaman.

(It is nostalgia with great meaning. There was no grey hair back then. Now, all of his (Najib's) hair and eyebrows are totally grey, which shows he has been through a lot.)

"Najib's hair and eyebrows have all turned grey. Total grey.

"He has gone through the ups and downs, the downs and ups.

"Kita berbangga dengan pencapaiannya dulu — MP, Adun, MB, menteri dan, kini, PM berasal dari Pekan, Pahang."

(We are proud of his [Najib's] past achievements — member of parliament, state assemblyman, menteri besar and, now, a prime minister from Pekan, Pahang.)

Tengku Abdullah was speaking at the official launching of DRB-Hicom University of Automotive Malaysia, Pekan's latest pride, sited at the auto hub of the royal town.

Najib, looking quite emotional but cheerful, thanked DRB-Hicom for investing up to RM500 million in developing the mammoth campus in Pekan.

Yesterday was a bittersweet trip for him, having survived not only four decades of political life, but also a testing year to cement his premiership of the government and the presidency of Umno.

He has had a tough year battling the 1Malaysia Development Bhd issue, managing the tougher economic conditions and countering attacks, especially from his former boss turned bitter critic Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Najib has certainly made his mark in Pekan.

He mooted the idea of a university in Pahang in 1998, when he was education minister.

Today, Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP) has a huge main campus in Pekan's Kuala Pahang, which Najib officiated yesterday.

The campus, and another one in Gambang, cost the government some RM700 million.

In his speech, Najib said he wanted UMP to remain as one of the country's four technical universities.

He stressed the importance of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics education, and told the cheerful crowd of his recent trip to Sunnylands and Silicon Valley in the United States, where innovations rule.

In a nostalgic trip where he succeeded his late father 40 years ago as Pekan MP, he named the main administrative building of UMP after Tun Abdul Razak Hussein.

Pekan was also a steep learning experience for Najib as an MP.

He suffered an electoral shock in the 1999 general election, when he won by just 241 votes.

He learnt his lesson, and made a strong comeback in the following election in 2004 by winning with a 22,922 margin.

Najib has put all this behind him. He has proven his political mettle.

Forty years is a long time in politics.

He has the political longevity and mastered the art of surviving even the most challenging of political tests.