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Dr M was a 'dictator in his time'

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Najib: He ruled with iron fist to ensure support

MELAKA: Former Umno president Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad was never a popular figure among party members during his tenure as president, revealed Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

The Umno president said Dr Mahathir ruled the party with an iron fist to ensure continued support from leaders and the grassroots.

"During his tenure, Umno members were afraid of him. He would go after you if you didn't support him," Najib said in his speech when opening the Masjid Tanah Umno division meeting here yesterday.

The Prime Minister said Dr Mahathir's dictatorial style of leadership was what had enabled him to remain as Umno president for so long.

He said Dr Mahathir, who is now Parti Bersatu Pribumi Malaysia chairman, was also an ungrateful leader who conveniently forgot those who supported him during his time of need.



Cute gift: Najib is given a cat by Puteri Umno leader Datuk Mas Ermieyati Samsudin (right) at Masjid Tanah in Melaka. Looking on are (from left) Melaka Chief Minister Datuk Seri Idris Haron, Dr Ahmad Zahid and Abd Rauf.

Najib said, without his support as the then Umno Youth vice-chief during the bitter party election in 1987, Dr Mahathir who was challenged by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah would not have won.

During the election, Dr Mahathir won by a razor-thin majority of only 43 votes.

"He has forgotten that without me throwing support behind him, he would not have emerged as win-

ner," he said.

Najib said Tengku Razaleigh was very upset with him for supporting Dr Mahathir, but for him "Umno and loyalty to the leadership must always come first".

He said, once he took over as Umno president, he had also abolished the quota system introduced by Dr Mahathir to remain in power.

"I did away with the unwanted system and allowed the 165,000

grassroots leaders to vote for top leaders," he said.

Also present at the event were deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, Melaka Umno chief Datuk Seri Idris Haron, Masjid Tanah Umno division chief Datuk Seri Abd Rauf Yusoh and former Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia supreme council member Kamarul Azman Habibur Rahman.

Najib said Dr Mahathir's attempt

to drive a wedge between him and Dr Ahmad Zahid was also a futile exercise, as he has full trust in his deputy.

"I treasure the friendship that we have since 1976. I attended courses and even slept in the same dormitory with Ahmad Zahid and it is impossible for someone to try to break these ties that go way back," he said.

Najib also announced that he would not turn against the party in the event that he was no longer president.

"Umno is a sacred party and no one should be allowed to destroy it," he added.

Earlier when opening the Bukit Katil Umno division meeting, Najib hailed former Umno deputy president Tun Ghafar Baba as a true party loyalist.

He said Ghafar's loyalty to the party was true and pure and his dedication should be emulated by all members.

"He once said that position was not important to him but Umno was.

"All of us must have this kind of spirit especially if we want to win back Bukit Katil," he said.