

**I was Najib's kingmaker, and I don't regret it, says Muhyiddin
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By Ram Anand**

Former Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said that he did not regret convincing Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak to go for the Umno presidency and to subsequently become Malaysia's prime minister in 2009.

He also revealed that former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad had asked him to go for the party presidency instead, to replace Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi who led the party and was prime minister then.

Muhyiddin said his refusal to deny Najib the position was proof of his loyalty, and questioned why some in Umno had begun sidelining him as the party deputy president, after he was dropped from the cabinet for openly questioning Najib over 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB).

Speaking at a dialogue session organised by publisher Karangkrak and Sinar Harian in Johor Bahru yesterday, Muhyiddin said that he was the one who first met Najib and urged him to take up the challenge after Barisan Nasional's (BN) poor performance in the 2008 general elections.

"The thing with Najib is, he takes a long time to make up his mind," he said.

That was when Dr Mahathir asked him to go for the Umno presidency instead, Muhyiddin said.

He refused, however, on the grounds that party hierarchy dictated that Najib, who was Abdullah's deputy, should be the next president.

"That's when I met Dr Mahathir and he asked me to go for the presidency," he added.

"But I said no, I can't, I am only party vice president, and Najib is the deputy president, so he should go for it," Muhyiddin said.

He said he was eventually the one who convinced Najib to take up the challenge and become prime minister.

"It was on a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Senai that I told him that he needs to make up his mind quickly and I told him that Dr Mahathir had asked me to take up the challenge instead," he said.

"That was when Najib said okay, he will do it. He agreed to it on a flight to Johor," he told a crowd of some 400 people, mainly Johor Umno grassroots members, at a hotel where the dialogue session was held.

Unlike Dr Mahathir, who is now calling for Najib's resignation, Muhyiddin said he had

no regrets over helping Najib become prime minister.

"I won't say I regret it. At that time, it was the right thing to do. He was qualified and capable to lead the country," he said.

"So, no one can doubt my loyalty. I have always been loyal to the leadership. In my years being in the government since 1981, I had never spoken out off line against the leadership," he added.

Muhyiddin, who remains Umno deputy president, said he was aware of implications after speaking his mind at the dialogue yesterday.

"I know I might face further implications, but it is better for me to tell the truth," he said.

He also said that he felt the post of deputy president in Umno was no longer respected after he was removed from the government in a cabinet reshuffle by Najib recently. In the July reshuffle, Muhyiddin lost both his deputy prime minister post and education ministry portfolio after openly criticising Najib over his handling of debt-ridden state-owned investment firm 1Malaysia Development Bhd.

"It's as though they don't respect the decisions of party members who elected me. Do they not trust me? Some tasks, which by tradition are done by deputy president, are not given to me anymore," he said.

"It's as though they don't remember my sacrifices for the party. I don't think I undermined anybody and I don't think I did anything wrong. Why is my party position being affected?" he added.

Muhyiddin was constantly applauded during his 90-minute speech by the crowd chanting "Hidup Tan Sri!" – October 24, 2015.

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