

From Public Relations Manager to Prime Minister

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PEKAN, Feb 21 (Bernama) -- The political career of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak began in Pekan following the sudden demise of his father Tun Abdul Razak Hussein on Jan 14, 1976, which saw his life being transformed from a corporate man into a full-time politician.

Upon obtaining his Bachelor's Degree in Industrial Economics from the University of Nottingham, England, Najib did not show any interest in politics and was more comfortable working as a public relations manager with Petronas.

According to UMNO veteran Abdul Majid Mohd, 85, Tun Razak's frequent trips to the ground to visit Pekan as a Member of Parliament did not interest Najib.

"Najib did not show any interest in politics at that time as he was raised in Kuala Lumpur and abroad during his studies and working life.

"Nonetheless after the demise of Tun Razak, it became a wake-up call for Najib to continue his father's legacy," said Abdul Majid, a former teacher, when met by Bernama.

Najib, who was only 22 at that time, bravely shouldered the responsibility left behind by his father Tun Razak by contesting in the Pekan parliamentary by-election in 1976.

"All party members at that time unanimously selected him as the candidate to represent UMNO. There was no opposition from the divisions, state or even the central leadership despite Najib being a greenhorn in politics.

"Nonetheless, due to his credibility and personality, he succeeded in winning the election uncontested to become the youngest member of parliament at that time," said Abdul Majid who added that many came to assist Najib in the campaign then.

During the election campaign, Abdul Majid, fondly known as Cikgu Majid, said Najib never complained despite having to follow him to visit every nook and corner of the constituency to meet voters.

Cikgu Majid, who was then 28 years old and the Kalong UMNO branch head, said that from that moment, Najib learnt all the rudiments of politics with the guidance of politicians on the ground.

"Najib inherited the leadership qualities of Tun Razak who was humble and a good listener. When he returned to his constituency, he did not observe protocol as it was his style to meet the people casually," he said.

He said Najib also did not like to listen to backbiting talk and was interested in investigating any news he received to ensure its credibility.

With his amiable outlook, Najib was able to climb up the political ladder by becoming the youngest MP in 1976, Deputy Energy, Telecommunications and Post Minister (1978-1980) and Menteri Besar of Pahang (1982-1986) until he became Prime Minister much later.

Nonetheless, Najib's political career was not all plain sailing as he was almost defeated in the 1999 general election by Keadilan candidate Ustaz Ramli Mohamed in the Pekan seat. Najib won with just a 241-vote majority.

Abdul Majid said that despite the narrow escape, Najib was not angry with the UMNO branch heads in Pekan at that time. He was in fact calm and went about resolving problems in the division.

Meanwhile, another UMNO veteran, Mariam Mohd Khalid, 70, said Najib's mother also played an important role in moulding Najib's personality when he began dabbling in politics.

"Tun Rahah taught him to be a humble leader despite being educated abroad as Najib did not forget his roots and was fluent in Bahasa Melayu to reach the people even at a young age," she said.

Meanwhile, Najib's press secretary when he was Pahang Menteri Besar, Mochtar Mahmod Baginda, 79, said that in a short span of time as the menteri besar, Najib was successful in resolving several problems in the state including the issuing of logging licences.

"Despite being a young menteri besar at the age of 29, he was able to tackle issues arising at that time. He would listen to the views of others and was diplomatic, while at the same time firm, in making decisions.

"The people and party became his priority and he once even risked his life in taking a helicopter in bad weather so as not to disappoint UMNO members in Pontian at a function there," he said.

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