

DAP members hold memorial service for Devan Nair

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MALAYSIA'S leading opposition party, the Democratic Action Party (DAP), would not have come into existence had it not been for former Singapore president Devan Nair, party leaders said yesterday.

They were speaking at a special memorial service to pay tribute to the former leader, who died of heart failure at the age of 82 last December.

Party officials said the event had taken some time to organise to accommodate the schedule of some of Mr Nair's family members.

More than 100 party members heard seven DAP veterans and party leaders pay tribute to Mr Nair at the service.

Veteran opposition stalwart Lim Kit Siang said he would not have joined the DAP had it not been for Mr Nair.

"When he called me one day looking for a political secretary, I readily took it up," he said.

Mr Lim eventually succeeded Mr Nair as the DAP's secretary-general and retired as party leader in 1999.

Fellow DAP founder Chen Man Hin said he received his tuition in politics from Mr Nair.

"There were just seven or eight of us when the party started. He inspired this small group to fight for a Malaysian Malaysia," said Dr Chen.

Mr Nair had originally

been elected as the People's Action Party's (PAP) only representative outside Singapore to the Bangsar ward here in the Malaysian Parliament in 1964, when the PAP contested national polls for the first time after Malaysia was formed in 1963.

When Singapore separated from Malaysia in 1965, Mr Nair chose to stay back in Malaysia as he said he did not want to abandon his voters. In 1966, he founded the DAP.

Persuaded by then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew to return to Singapore in 1967, Mr Nair took over the leadership of the National Trades Union Congress, which he helped establish in 1961. He was later elected as a PAP MP for the Anson constituency in the mid-1970s.

Mr Nair became president in 1981 but resigned four years later after it was disclosed that he was an alcoholic. Mr Nair later denied such an addiction.

Shortly after, he left Singapore for the United States. He later took up residency in Canada in 1993.

Speaking on behalf of Mr Nair's family, his son Janamitra said his father chose to stay in Malaysia after the separation because he could not abandon his constituents.

"As a friend in Singapore said then, he seemed like an astronaut abandoned in space. The astronaut, of course, soon formed the Democratic Action Party and became the new party's first secretary-general."