

# From soft-spoken boy to a determined man

Datuk Idris Shaari Mat Aris, who spent almost 45 years as an aide with Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Tun Razak's family, tells SA'ODAH ELIAS what Najib was like as a boy and a young man and how greatness was thrust upon him.

It all started in 1965 when I became Allahyarham Tun Razak (Second Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein) personal bodyguard. I was still in the police force then. I was only 25 and Najib was 12.



The patriarch: Second Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak. Najib shares many similar traits with his father.

I found him to be a very well-mannered and quiet boy. He was not buas (boisterous) at all. Looking after him was a breeze.

It was the same with the rest of his brothers, except for Mohd Nazir who, being the youngest, was a bit spoilt.

As part of my job, I had to accompany him to tuition classes. All that stopped when he was sent to study in England three years later. Until he finished his studies and came back for good, I only saw him maybe once a year when he returned during the holiday break.

Even from an early age, Najib reminded me so much of his father. The way he smiles and his serious demeanour - that is exactly like Tun Razak.

The last time Tun Razak went to London in January 1976, I did not go with him as he had not brought along his wife Toh Puan (Tun Rahah Noah) with him. Tun Razak was always careful about spending the government's money. Even when he travelled on an official capacity, he would only bring along one ADC (aide-de-camp), one bodyguard and his private secretary.

The day before Tun Razak passed away on Jan 14, he had requested that his youngest son, Nazir, be flown to London.



Family shot: Najib (left) with his brother Ahmad Johari and mother Tun Rahah Mohd Noah.

Thus, arrangements were made for Toh Puan Helen Chen (Tan Sri Michael Chen's wife) to accompany him to London.

However, before they could leave, the family received word of Tun Razak's passing.

Najib, who at that time was working for Petronas as an executive, was out of the house when the message came in. So the family sent someone to pass him the message and he came home immediately and went straight into his room.

Everyone who needed to see him, to tell him something or to consult him over arrangements, had to go to his room as he never came out the whole day.

That is how he is. He is a very private man. He grieved in private.

As far as I know, he had never aspired to be a politician, to follow in his father's footsteps. In fact, Tun Razak was also not keen for his son to be in politics. That was why he never groomed them and taught them the ropes. In fact, Datuk Jo (Mohd Johari, Najib's younger brother who is a lawyer) had

told me that on his last trip to London, Tun Razak had discussed retiring and practising law again with his son when he returned to Kuala Lumpur. But it was not to be.



Cute toddler: Datuk Idris holding a framed picture of Najib when he was two years old.

Najib was actually thrust into politics the night of his father's funeral when he was appointed the Datuk Shahbandar of Pekan to succeed his father.

Later, he was chosen by Barisan Nasional to take over his father's Pekan Parliamentary seat. He won the seat uncontested.

When he became an MP, I was appointed by the Cabinet to look after him. After all, he was only 23 and was expected to do things that he was very unfamiliar with. I was not only his bodyguard, I was the general dogsbody. I took care of many things, including what he ate and drank.

The first time I heard him giving a speech in Bahasa Malaysia, I cringed in shame. I still remember, he was officiating at a PTA meeting in one of the schools in Pekan.

It was a rural school, so he was forced to give his speech in Bahasa Malaysia. There are no words to describe it...he was just terrible. I could not bear to listen to his speech, so I ran to the car and sat there with his driver until the end of his speech. As he had spent the greater part of his growing-up years in England, he was more conversant in English than Bahasa Malaysia then.

However, soon after, he started learning Bahasa Malaysia in earnest. He had a tutor coming to the house to teach him Bahasa Malaysia. Soon, his Bahasa Malaysia was as good as yours and mine. He even became proficient in writing and reading in Jawi.



Birthday boy: Najib (right) cutting a birthday cake shaped like an aeroplane with his brother Ahmad Johari

That is the Najib that I know. He is a very determined person. If he wanted something, he would strive effortlessly for it. He is not the type to give up.

Then, when he was appointed Deputy Energy Minister, I quit working for him because the government had appointed him a personal bodyguard. But I have remained in the service of his family until today.

So in essence, I feel as if he is part of my family, and I am part of his.

That is why I feel, as an elder, I can freely give him advice. When he was first appointed as Defence Minister, I went to his house in Kenny Hills. I told him, "Datuk, in whatever circumstances, you must be loyal to the leader of the country, just as your daddy who had remained loyal to Tunku (first prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj) even when people around him, and most of the Malays in 1969 were very angry and did not want Tunku anymore."

He promised me then that he would be loyal to the leaders.

(Tun Razak was the deputy prime minister when racial riots broke out in Kuala Lumpur on May 13, 1969.)

Thanks be to God, he still holds on to that promise that he gave me until today. He was a loyal deputy, unlike Anwar (Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim who, when he was the deputy prime minister, had gone against his boss, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad) who was disloyal, and that was why he could not become the Prime Minister.

Najib held on to his word. He was patient, even when people around him had tried to influence him. It is always the people around you who would try to create trouble. It was actually the same with Tun Razak.

Again, when he was appointed to be the Deputy Prime Minister, I went to his office in the Defence Ministry. I felt duty-bound to give him some advice as I was getting disturbed over talk that he was involved in this and that. And there had been complaints that he was not very friendly.

I said to him, "Datuk, I have been in the service of your family for more than 40 years. I have no personal interest, except for what is best for you. So if you want to get angry with me, I will not blame you. But I must remind you, be kind to your staff, just as your father was. Take care of the people and most importantly, to ask about all those fitnah (accusations) that I have been hearing."

I also ticked him off over the way he shook hands with people.

Till today, I still remember what he said, his pledge to me to safeguard his father's and family's name.

And today, he does not only give people a firm handshake, but has no qualms about entering kampung houses right up to the kitchen, especially when he visits his constituents.

Najib is also very close to his mother. Before he decides to do anything, he would return home to inform his mother. Even now, when he is very busy with government work, he would always try to return home for dinner with the family every Wednesday.

It is a tradition that started since Tun Razak's time. Wednesday is the day when the whole family would have dinner together.

Najib is also a very simple man when it comes to food. Like his father he loves river fish dishes.

He is also very loving and easy with his children, including the three from his previous marriage. I would know, because I helped raise them together with Toh Puan. They would tell him everything because he is a very good listener.

**Tun Rahah Mohd Noah, the mother of Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, did not think that her son would one day be like her late husband and become Prime Minister.**



Loving son: Najib's mother Tun Rahah Mohd Noah said that despite his hectic schedule, he would still call her and drop by for meals every now and then.

Even as a child, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak was a disciplined lad who "studied when it was time to study, and played when it was time to play".

As he grew older, he displayed his late father (Malaysia's second Prime Minister) Tun Abdul Razak's trait of having patience and also became very focused on his job, said Najib's mother Tun Rahah Mohd Noah.

"When Najib took over his father's role in Pekan (as MP), it never crossed my mind that he would one day become Prime Minister.

"I believe he will do his best for the rakyat and the country, just as his father did. I am thankful. As a mother, I pray that Najib can carry out his duties well and I hope he will be successful," said Rahah, 75, in an interview at her home in Jalan Eaton, Ampang, Kuala Lumpur recently.





As a child, Najib was not a fussy eater and ate what was served. His favourite drink was Coca-Cola. He loved to play football and to cycle about.

Rahah added that as the eldest of five siblings, Najib was close to all his younger brothers without playing favourites.

His four younger brothers are Datuk Ahmad Johari, Datuk Mohamed Nizam, Datuk Mohamed Nazim, and Datuk Mohamed Nazir.



Poignant snapshot: Tun Rahah Mohd Noah (right) with her late husband Tun Abdul Razak (left) and their five sons in the 1970s. This was the last family photo taken before Tun Abdul Razak passed away in 1976. Their sons (from left): Mohamed Nazim, Mohd Najib, Mohd Nazir (youngest, in front), Ahmad Johari, and Mohamed Nizam.

After Najib completed his secondary education in St John's Institution in Kuala Lumpur, he went on to pursue his education at Malvern Boy's College in England, and later obtained his degree in Economics from the University of Nottingham.

When asked who had influenced Najib to join politics, she replied: "Nobody encouraged him. I think it was his own choice, but his late father used to bring him to the villages, and it was through such trips that he saw his father's efforts in pushing for development for the people and the country."

Asked how often he would visit her despite his hectic schedule, she said: "Well, he is very busy on national matters. When he is free, he will call me, and he will drop by for meals.

"His favourite dishes are ikan patin masak lemak with cili padi, roti canai and sambal tumis telur," she said.