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`Sympathetic' Tokyo Govt hoped

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday expressed hope that the new Japanese Government will have a sympathetic attitude towards the problems in South-East Asia.

He was asked to comment on the resignation of Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto on Monday, following the defeat of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in the country's Upper House elections.

The LDP retained only 44 of its 61 seats in the elections, its worst result since the 1989 polls.

"We are shock that he lost so badly. We hope the new leadership will have a sympathetic attitude towards the problems in South-east Asia," Dr Mahathir told reporters after opening the Hospital University Kebangsaan Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur.

Hashimoto, who is also the president of the ruling LDP, took the blame for the party's losses and voters backlash against the Government's handling of the economy.

Hashimoto's Cabinet will resign as soon as a new leader is chosen and accepted by the Japanese Parliament. Party lawmakers will met on July 21 to select a new leader, but until then Hashimoto will remain as the Prime Minister.

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