

**Abdullah sworn in as PM for second term**  
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Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was sworn in for a second term Monday, defying calls to quit after presiding over the ruling coalition's worst ever election performance. MCPX

Dressed in a traditional costume and matching songkok, Abdullah took an oath before Malaysia's King Mizan Zainal Abidin in a solemn ceremony at the royal palace in Kuala Lumpur.

Also attending were his heir apparent, Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, and other senior ministers who then went into a meeting of the dominant Umno which leads the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition.

BN was mauled in Saturday's election, losing its crucial two-thirds majority in Parliament for the first time since 1969 and conceding four states to the resurgent opposition, which now controls five in all.

Voters punished the coalition for rising inflation and its mishandling of racial tensions, leading to a backlash from minority ethnic Chinese and Indians as well as Malays who form its powerbase.

**Why should I step down?**

But Abdullah told supporters he would not quit.

"Why should I step down?" he told a cheering crowd outside his home late yesterday. "Our party has won. I do not fear anyone except Allah. I will stay on, I will not give up.

"We have to continue our struggle, our agenda is far from over. We want our country to be progressive and successful and for you, the people, to be happy."

Government heavyweights lined up to pledge their continuing allegiance to the premier, led by Najib who urged the ruling party to "close ranks" to face the challenge posed by the electoral setback.

But veteran leader Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who ruled for two decades before handing power to Abdullah as his chosen successor in 2003, accused the prime minister of "destroying" the coalition and led calls for his resignation.

"I think he should accept responsibility for this. He should accept 100 percent responsibility," Mahathir said yesterday. "I am sorry, but I apparently made the wrong choice."

Abdullah's task now is to form a new government under the BN, a coalition of 14 race-based parties including ethnic Chinese and Indian parties that were annihilated in the polls.

**'Focus on economics'**

Meanwhile the opposition, led by former deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim - who has made a stunning political comeback after his sacking and jailing a decade ago - was getting down to business.

The opposition parties - Anwar's PKR, the pre-dominantly Chinese DAP and Islamic party PAS - won an unprecedented four states in the polls.

PAS also extended its margin in Kelantan, which it had held by a razor-thin majority.

State media said PAS would appoint chief ministers in Kedah and while a DAP figure will preside in Penang and a PKR chief minister will run Selangor as well as Perak.

Anwar said late yesterday that the coalition parties would be able to put aside their ideological differences and govern effectively.

He said they would "focus on the economic issue and trying to resolve some of the problems affecting the masses, particularly in the issue of poverty and the normal needs of an average citizen.

"What was promised will be enforced with the best of ability."

Anwar is banned from holding public office until April 15 due to a conviction for corruption, and he said his plans to enter Parliament in a by-election were on hold until he consolidated his party's gains.

### **End of racial politics**

Observers said Malaysia's fractured, race-based political scene has been shattered by the electoral outcome, and looked set to be replaced by a modern two-party system.

The Star newspaper said in an editorial that BN could consider reforming into a one-party, multi-racial organisation, to face the challenge from PKR which represents all three ethnic groups.

"The first page of the new Malaysian political era opens today," it said.

Malaysia's bourse was shaken by the political earthquake, leading to a one-hour suspension triggered automatically when the bourse falls by more than 10 percent.

The main index closed down 123.11 points or 9.5 percent at 1,173.22 in the biggest tumble since the height of the Asian financial crisis in September 1998, when the bourse dived 21 percent in a single session.