

Mukhriz's press conference causes a stir
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A drama of sorts unfolded at a press conference by newly-elected Jerlun MP Mukhriz Mahathir today.

The media was alerted to cover the press conference where Mukhriz, youngest son of ex-premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad, was scheduled to speak at 3pm at a hotel in Seberang Jaya, Penang.

The journalists were told that Mukhriz, also an Umno Youth exco member, will call on Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to quit. Youth wing leaders from Perak, Penang and Kedah were expected to back Mukhriz's call.

But come 3pm, Mukhriz was nowhere to be found at the hotel. There were others there, numbering some 200 - majority of whom were plainclothes police - waiting at the hotel for his arrival. There were also police trucks and the light strike force members on standby.

There were also moments of slight tension as journalists were informed that ugly scenes may occur when Mukhriz arrives.

After a 90-minute wait, the journalists were told by Mukhriz's aide to go to another hotel located nearby quietly to avoid the remaining crowd from following them.

Malaysiakini later learnt that the change of venue was apparently because some Abdullah's supporters were waiting for Mukhriz to counter his attack against the premier, who was sworn in for the second term this morning.

Security was tight at the press conference, where only the media representatives and Mukhriz's supporters were allowed in. A large number of plainclothes police were barred from entering the venue.

Mukhriz was seen drafting his speech and discussing with his aides when the journalists arrived. There were also about 100 supporters present.

Remedial actions needed

At the 20-minute press conference which ensued later, Mukhriz however did not call on Abdullah to resign as expected and but in a toned-down statement reiterated that Abdullah should "do the right thing".

"The voice of the people is very clear, we appeal to the leadership to take cognisance of the people's wishes and to take the correct initiatives to remedy the situation," he said when asked on whether he believed Abdullah should quit in the wake of BN's worst ever polls performance.

mukhriz mahathir pc in penang 110308 04He declined to elaborate on what he referred to as 'correct initiatives' despite repeatedly being grilled by the horde of journalists, including those from the foreign wires who had flown in from Kuala Lumpur this morning. He merely

said people want to see "some changes".

"I can't be sure of what the changes will be, but we are confident that Umno and BN will use its own party machinery and process to take remedial action to return to people's confidence," he noted.

He expressed hopes that the Umno members will air their views on what measures were needed to be taken in the party's election, which is expected to be held later this year.

According to Mukhriz, there are "a number of people" who shared his father's view that Abdullah should quit over the polls outcome, which saw the BN denied its two-thirds majority for the first time and losing five state governments to the opposition.

The Umno rising star described this as an "unmitigated, unprecedented situation" and should serve as a wake-up call to Umno and BN.

Among the factors that led to the humiliating elections results, he said, were that the government was not addressing real issues that was close to the people's heart.

No rally in Penang

The press conference was interrupted briefly when a supporter vented his frustration at Mukhriz for not making a stronger statement.

mukhriz mahathir pc in penang 110308 01"Is that what you really want to say?" said the angry supporter.

Asked on the change of the press conference venue, Mukhriz merely said he felt there was "some tensions" going on and that he did not want the event to turn chaotic.

On the widely-circulated SMS alert that he was to call for Abdullah's resignation, he said he did not know who was behind the circulation of the text message.

An aide to Mukhriz later also denied that there was a rally, said to be held in Penang tonight and organised by Mukhriz to demand for Abdullah's resignation.

Mahathir has earlier urged Abdullah to resign and conceded he had made a mistake in picking him as his successor.