

Mukhriz calls for PM to quit
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Umno leader Mukhriz Mahathir has called for Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to resign after the ruling coalition's unprecedented election setback. MCPX

mukhriz mahathir 050406As a member of Umno's influential young wing, Mukhriz is the highest-ranking member of the party to openly push for Abdullah to stand down.

"I feel that Abdullah has to take responsibility for our losses and that the honourable thing to do is to withdraw," said Mukhriz Mahathir, who has written a letter to the premier calling for him to quit. [See full letter]

The call adds to the pressure on Abdullah, who heads the ruling (Umno), which leads the Barisan Nasional coalition that was humbled in the March 8 polls.

"By his resignation, then at least the confidence in Umno and Barisan Nasional will be somewhat restored in the eyes not only of the people but also our members," Mukhriz told AFP.

Five days ago, Mukhriz's father, former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad had made a similar call for Abdullah to quit.

However, the embattled premier won his party's backing in a meeting on Monday and he has vowed not to surrender.

'Voters reject you as PM'

In his letter to Abdullah dated March 12, Mukhriz said the election result was a strong message from voters.

"The unhappy voters gave a clear message, that is they reject you as head of the government," he said.

"Therefore if (Abdullah) does not resign soon, I really fear that the trust by the people in Umno and Barisan will disintegrate."

Mahathir, who led Umno and the nation for 22 years before stepping down in 2003, lashed out at his successor after the worst performance in its half-century rule over Malaysia.

"My view is he has destroyed Umno, destroyed the BN and he has been responsible for this," the veteran politician said on Sunday.

Mahathir has previously said he never intended for Abdullah to serve more than one term, and that he should have opted instead for influential deputy prime minister Najib Razak who is now leader-in-waiting.

Pro-Mahathir website

Calls for Abdullah's resignation are also coming from Umno's rank-and-file who are posting their comments on a pro-Mahathir website.

"I urge Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to resign gracefully before the Umno general assembly (in November)," said one of the respondents.

Tengku Razaleigh, a 70-year-old former finance minister who made a failed challenge against Abdullah for the premiership in 2004, also urged the premier to accept responsibility for the dismal electoral performance.

The coalition was "defeated and shamed on a scale without precedent in our history," he said Sunday, calling on the entire party leadership to step down.

"To begin immediately the process of restoring ourselves, the leadership team must wake from its slumber, face the truth and accept full responsibility for this debacle," he said.

Umno insiders said there was intense backroom-dealing going on as Abdullah put together a cabinet due to be unveiled early next week, and that in some cases pressure was being exerted in order to obtain top positions.

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