

**Pak Lah's days as PM are numbered**  
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Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has defiantly claimed a mandate to rule despite unprecedented election losses, but observers say he is on borrowed time as calls for his resignation persist. MCPX

abdullah ahmad badawi election announcement 130208 confident "I will run the government. I'm in charge," Abdullah said in a television interview a week after his Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition was humbled by the loss of four states and a third of parliamentary seats.

"I do not believe that with a majority less than two-thirds we become incapable or incapacitated or we become lifeless and cannot do anything else," he said late Saturday.

After securing the support of his party, the Umno which leads the coalition, he has made plans to unveil a new cabinet and implement a series of mega-projects.

Abdullah admitted that Malaysians were disappointed with his administration, which was criticised as weak and unable to deliver on promises made ahead of 2004 polls which he won in a landslide.

"People are unhappy over what has transpired over the last four years since I took over," he said in another nationally broadcast interview on Friday.

"I accept in good faith the decision of the people," he said, noting that seething racial tensions, inflation and rising crime rates had led to voters punishing him in the polls.

**Petition for PM to step down**

Just before Friday's address, the son of former premier Mahathir Mohamad wrote to Abdullah calling on him to quit, in the first open sign of revolt from within Umno.

"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 is a member of Umno's powerful youth wing.

Mahathir has also pushed for Abdullah to step down, accusing him of "destroying" the ruling party and the coalition, and saying he regretted selecting him for the top job when he stood down in 2003.

Pressure on the premier is also coming from Umno's rank-and-file who have signed up to a petition for him to quit posted on a pro-Mahathir website.

Analysts said Abdullah's days as prime minister are numbered and that if he refused to step down he would likely be challenged at Umno's internal elections later this year.

"He's a lame duck prime minister," said Bridget Welsh, a Southeast Asia expert from Johns Hopkins University who observed the elections.

"The reality is the business community is looking at him and thinking, how long will he stay

there, and the longer he stays it's going to introduce more uncertainty."

### **New cabinet line-up closely watched**

Farish A Noor from the Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore said Abdullah's government was punished for failing to deliver on its big reform promises in the last 2004 polls.

"Abdullah dug his own grave by promising more than he could chew on. He could have saved himself by delivering at least half of it," he told AFP.

"I strongly suspect that moves will be made at the upcoming Umno general assembly to force Abdullah to step down."

The premier is expected to unveil a new cabinet within days, and observers are watching closely to see if his promises of a fresh new line-up will be realised.

Mohammad Agus Yusoff, a political analyst from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia said the political upheaval should prompt Abdullah to make difficult reforms.

"He is on the right track if he is thinking of revamping the BN and its policies. The country will benefit from this scenario," he said.

Welsh said however that while investor confidence may be bolstered by fresh faces in the government, Abdullah may be exposing himself to further challenges.

"The minute he removes older faces he weakens himself further with more infighting and leadership challenges," she said.

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