

Anwar says he's moving toward forming new government
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Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim today said he was moving towards forming a new government after landmark elections, with the help of defectors from the ruling coalition.
MCPX

anwar ibrahim pc 180208 05"I don't know how soon we can form the new government but we are moving in that direction," the former deputy premier, who was sacked and jailed a decade ago, told AFP in an interview.

The three-party opposition alliance made unprecedented gains in March 8 polls, seizing more than a third of parliamentary seats and four more states from the dominant Barisan Nasional coalition.

Anwar said that coalition lawmakers from Sabah and Sarawak had contacted him to discuss switching sides. The power bloc there could unseat the government if it changed hands.

"The MPs from there have come here to see me," Anwar said, adding that he was in no hurry to become the next prime minister, but that the opposition would already be in power if the polls had been clean and fair.

"I am maintaining that if there was no fraud in the election, we would have won. If we had two percent more votes we would have formed the new government," he said.

Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi dismissed Anwar's plans, and downplayed suggestions of splits within Umno after the resignation of its secretary-general Radzi Sheikh Ahmad.

The Umno leads the ruling coalition.

Umno in turmoil

abdullah ahmad badawi pc 190308 02"Why should the government topple? The government is very strong, we have strong support, we don't go around buying people," he said.

"There is no fight in Umno, it's just a matter of reorganisation," he said of Radzi's departure.

The coalition's worst election performance in its half-century history has triggered calls for Abdullah to resign, but he has secured his party's support and his new-look cabinet was sworn in Wednesday.

Anwar said however that Abdullah's future was in jeopardy and that the Umno was riven by infighting and looming defections.

"Certainly, Abdullah's Umno is in a turmoil since there is infighting in the party. Abdullah is in a precarious position," he said.

Cracks in the ruling party have already appeared, with former premier Dr Mahathir

Mohamad's son Mukhriz - himself a prominent Umno member - calling for Abdullah to resign and escaping punishment for his move.

The resignation of Radzi, who was dropped as home minister in the new cabinet, triggered more talk of internal disputes.

"I feel that I cannot work effectively any more in the present circumstances," Radzi said.

Anwar's return to Parliament

Anwar said Abdullah's attempt to rejuvenate his administration by downsizing the cabinet, dropping veterans and tainted politicians and introducing fresh faces will not spur confidence in his leadership.

"It is an attempt to assure public confidence. But I think it has fallen flat," he said.

"Abdullah brought some new faces... to boost his image but at the same time kept and also appointed some who are tainted with corruption," he said.

BN will have 140 lawmakers in the new 222-seat parliament, against 199 in the outgoing 219-seat parliament. The opposition alliance won 82 seats from just 20 previously.

Anwar's PKR, which is formally headed by his wife, will be the biggest opposition party in parliament, but Anwar is barred from standing for public office until April because of a corruption conviction.

Once heir apparent to Mahathir, he suffered a spectacular fall from grace in 1998 on graft and sex charges widely seen as politically motivated.

Anwar has said he will return to Parliament through a by-election in a seat held by PKR, but that the plan is on hold until he consolidates PKR's unexpected electoral gains.