

BN won't be toppled, says Abdullah
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Beh Lih Yi

Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today dismissed talks that the government is in danger of being toppled by the rumoured massive defection of his Barisan Nasional parliamentarians to the opposition. MCPX

abdullah ahmad badawi pc 190308 03“Why should the government be toppled? This government is very strong, we have the support too. We don't go around purchasing people,” he told reporters after chairing a two-hour cabinet meeting, the first after the March 8 polls, in Putrajaya this afternoon.

The premier said this when he was asked to comment on opposition figurehead Anwar Ibrahim's claims that a number of BN MPs are ready to cross over to the opposition parties.

“He (Anwar) claims so many things, let him claim whatever he wants,” said Abdullah, who was accompanied by his deputy Najib Abdul Razak.

The opposition parties, which jointly controlled 82 parliamentary seats now, will be able to take over the federal government from BN if they gain another 30 seats.

In its dismay electoral performance on the March 8 polls, BN for the first time lost its two-thirds majority in Parliament. The coalition also lost control of four states to the opposition on top of failing to retain Kelantan despite much hopes. BN now has 140 seats.

No infighting in Umno

In the same press conference, the premier also said Umno - the backbone of BN - remained strong as he rejected talks that the new cabinet line-up unveiled yesterday would cause a split in the party.

The new cabinet line-up so far has prompted Radzi Sheikh Ahmad to quit as the Umno and BN secretary-general while some Umno Wanita members complained of its non-representation.

Two Umno leaders have also declined to accept their deputy minister positions, stating that they were senior enough to be made ministers.

rafidah pc 190308 rafidah azizUmno Wanita chief Rafidah Abdul Aziz and Radzi were both unexpectedly dropped from the line-up and were the two most senior 'casualties' in yesterday's announcement.

“Why should it create division? Tell me how it will create division? There is no (internal) fight,” Abdullah countered when asked by a journalist.

Abdullah did not directly answer whether the resignation of Radzi - seen as his right-hand man - was deemed as a setback but said he had no objections and respected the latter's decision.

He said the decision was conveyed to him by Radzi through a phone conversation.

"He didn't say anything that is improper, he just said he was giving up the posts," said Abdullah.

Radzi had said that he decided to step down as he would not be able to discharge his duties effectively as he was not in the cabinet announced by Abdullah yesterday.

To this, Abdullah said that different individuals would have different perception on Radzi's reasoning.

He argued that there have been previous cases where leaders who were not in the cabinet could still perform effectively in party work.

Abdullah, who is also Umno and BN chief, said he will meet with the Umno Wanita members to explain on the non-representation in the cabinet.

"I will be meeting them, and explain to them. They will understand (my decision because) not many Umno Wanita (members) who won in the last general election," he argued.

Let Umno Youth decide

The premier also confirmed that former tourism minister Tengku Adnan Mansor would replace Radzi as the Umno secretary-general.

"I have spoken to Tengku Adnan and he is willing to accept the post," said Abdullah.

On the two deputy ministers who have refused to take up the posts offered to them after the line-up was publicly announced yesterday, Abdullah said he has met with the duo last night.

The duo - Tengku Azlan Abu Bakar and Anifah Aman - considered they were senior enough to be made full ministers since they have been deputy ministers in the previous terms.

"Of course it's sad, everybody will be sad if you are not having promotion, that's only natural for (them). Nothing beyond that except to say that (they) are willing to make way (for others)."

mukhriz mahathir gaza fund 010208 talking
Meanwhile, on Umno Youth's decision not to act against its exco member Mukhriz Mahathir, Abdullah said it was entirely up to the wing to make the decision on the matter.

Mukhriz, the youngest son of ex-premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad, has written to Abdullah to step down in the wake of BN's disastrous showing in the last general election.

Mukhriz's letter was leaked and has been widely circulated on the Internet.

"It's a decision by the Umno Youth in what they think is the best interest for the party. It's up to them, I don't instruct the Umno Youth to do this and that," said Abdullah.

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