

PM wades into royal tussle
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Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has declared unconstitutional the appointment of Ahmad Said as the new Terengganu menteri besar, in a rare showdown with the nation's royal rulers, reports said today. MCPX

Terengganu is the only state that has yet to install a government chief, two weeks after elections in which Abdullah's ruling coalition suffered its worst ever results.

The coalition led by Umno retained control of Terengganu but Abdullah's choice for menteri besar, incumbent Idris Jusoh, was overlooked by the state palace which appointed another Umno figure.

"Idris Jusoh commands majority support (among the elected state representatives). This has not changed," Abdullah said according to the official Bernama news agency.

"As such, the appointment of any other person to the post is unconstitutional," he said.

Low point for Umno

Malaysia's elections, which delivered four more states and a third of parliamentary seats to the opposition, triggered tussles with royals in other states but appointees there had the support of the majority of lawmakers.

The New Straits Times said in an editorial that an unhappy relationship between the menteri besar and royal rulers could result in "trouble and acrimony".

Analysts say the clash between the Terengganu palace and Abdullah's government is symptomatic of the prime minister's weakened position after the unprecedented election losses.

"Abdullah was already weak to begin with and the crisis in Terengganu just shows how much more worse off his position is," said Tricia Yeo from the Centre for Public Policy Studies.

"It shows the rampant infighting within the party that is now preventing the government from getting down to rule the country," she added. "It is definitely a low point for Umno."

Under Malaysia's rotating monarchy, the Sultan of Terengganu is at present the Malaysian king and has delegated his powers to his son who is only eight years old and so co-reigns with a three-member Regency Advisory Council.