

Abdullah : big mistake to ignore cyber-campaign
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Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today said his "biggest mistake" in disastrous elections was to ignore cyber-campaigning on the Internet which was seized by the opposition. MCPX

The powerful Barisan Nasional coalition suffered its worst-ever results in March 8 polls that left five states and a third of parliamentary seats in opposition hands.

The opposition, which was largely ignored by government-linked mainstream media, instead waged an enormously successful online campaign using blogs, news websites and SMS text messages.

abdullah ahamd badawi investment malaysia 250308 02 "We certainly lost the Internet war, the cyber-war," Abdullah said in a speech to an investment conference.

"It was a serious misjudgement. We made the biggest mistake in thinking that it was not important," he said.

"We thought that the newspapers, the print media, the television was supposed to be important, but the young people were looking at SMS and blogs."

The comments are a major about-face for the government, which had vilified bloggers, calling them liars and threatening them with detention without trial under draconian internal security laws.

In line with promises to reform after the humiliating election results, Abdullah said the government would "respond effectively" and move to empower young Malaysians.

"It was painful ... but it came at the right time, not too late," he said.

Malaysia's mainstream media are mostly part-owned by parties in the ruling coalition, and what was seen as biased coverage in the run-up to last month's vote alienated voters and boosted demand for alternative news sources.

Media watchdog Reporters Without Borders ranks Malaysia 124 out of 169 on its worldwide press freedom index. It says mainstream media are "often compelled to ignore or to play down" opposition events.