

Mahathir backs Ku Li to challenge PM
Malaysiakini.com
Mar 30, 2008

Former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad has backed a senior party leader in his bid to challenge the prime minister after the ruling coalition's recent surprise poll losses. MCPX

mahathir mohamad 180108Umno veteran Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah had said he would challenge Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi for the party leadership if he received enough support.

Umno leads the Barisan Nasional coalition that was humbled in the March 8 polls, and the party's leader traditionally takes the job of prime minister.

ku li tengku razaleigh interview 241106 significant"Tengku Razaleigh may be one of them (to contest against Abdullah). A challenge (for the top post) is healthy," Mahathir said, adding: "I don't think Umno is so poor in talent."

Umno is scheduled to hold a party leadership election in December. Members of the party and former leaders including Mahathir have called on Abdullah to resign.

Dr M: Abolish 30% rule

But Mahathir said it would be difficult for anyone to challenge Abdullah because of a requirement to secure 30 percent, or 58 nominations, from the 191 Umno divisions.

"I think it should be abolished because of the tendency of the people in power to stifle any move to challenge them," he said of the requirement implemented when Mahathir was party leader.

Mahathir said Tengku Razaleigh failed to win sufficient nominations in 2004 for the top post because Umno divisions were warned against nominating him.

"He (Tengku Razaleigh) only got one nomination because other divisions were told not to nominate him," he said.

Abdullah has claimed a mandate to rule despite the unprecedented election losses, but observers say he is on borrowed time as calls for his resignation persist.