

**Mahathir urges government to welcome Mugabe**  
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Former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday said Malaysia should welcome Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe if he goes into exile following elections in his country.  
MCPX

Mahathir, who is seen as a close Mugabe ally in the region, said he expected the Zimbabwean leader to accept the results of national polls in the African nation.

robert mugabe "If he wants to come here, the (Malaysian) government should welcome him," Mahathir told reporters.

"If he has lost, he has to accept the decision of the people, that is the best thing he can do," he added.

Mahathir's comments come amid fevered speculation over the past few days that Mugabe, who has been silent and has not appeared in public since voting on Saturday, has left the country for exile in a friendly state.

A foreign ministry official told AFP they were unaware of Mugabe's plans.

The former premier's comments come as Zimbabwe's ruling party Thursday geared up for a final battle to save Mugabe's 28-year presidency, saying it was ready for an election run-off with opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai.

State media said a run-off was now the most likely outcome after no clear winner emerged from Saturday's polls. A government spokesman said Mugabe's party was ready for a new battle in the second round.

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