

Rais Yatim backs succession plan
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Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today faced open calls from key party leaders to formalise his plans to relinquish power, in the wake of an unprecedented election setback. MCPX

Abdullah last week reportedly said he would hold discussions on a transition to his deputy Najib Razak, but only after December leadership polls for his Umno.

In the most significant challenge to date, Foreign Minister Rais Yatim told the official Bernama news agency that it was the right of Umno members to ask Abdullah to step down or announce a succession plan.

"I feel if the succession plan is announced, then the grassroots leaders would know the time frame, and that is good to stabilise the party. The grassroots should be allowed to say what they feel," he said.

Abdullah has faced persistent calls to quit after the Umno-led coalition lost its two-thirds majority in parliament and control of five states in March 8 general elections.

He has claimed a mandate to rule, but confirmed that Najib will succeed him, in line with Umno tradition.

Muhyiddin, Khir Toyo weigh in

Pressure on the premier also came from Trade Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, an influential Umno vice-president, who said the party would "fade away" if there were no immediate changes to the leadership.

"I think the sentiments are boiling at the grassroots. Therefore, if change does not happen in Umno, many adverse things will surface," he said according to a newspaper interview.

"Will it be able to redeem its loss while we face the wave of new political thinking or will we collapse into the political chasm for good?" he asked.

Meanwhile, former Selangor menteri besar Dr Mohd Khir Toyo has called on Abdullah to put in place a succession plan that will see Najib taking over without any delay.

"Abdullah must face the facts and make an exit or retirement plan that allows the taking over of the party and government leadership by his deputy Najib," said Khir in his blog.

Former Malaysian leader Mahathir Mohamad, who handed over to Abdullah in 2003 but has since said he regretted his choice, on Saturday called on him to resign immediately to ensure a smooth handover.

Abdullah reportedly accepted partial responsibility for the party's electoral losses over the weekend, and said he would not "retain the leadership forever".

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