

PM shocked by Dr M's decision
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Umno president Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was shocked by his predecessor's MCPX decision to quit the party but will not meet him personally to ask him to reconsider the decision.

Abdullah, who is also prime minister, was nevertheless confident that there would not be a mass exodus of party members following Dr Mahathir Mohamad's lead.

abdullah ahmad badawi pm mahathir quits umno pc 190508 04He also vowed he would not step down as demanded by Mahathir and to instead continue leading the party.

The embattled premier, who has been under fire for BN's dismal performance in the March 8 general election, also called for "calm" within Umno.

"I was surprised that he resigned and does not want to be in Umno anymore," the premier told reporters, after years of feuding between the pair. "I had never thought that he would actually take the step to leave the party."

Abdullah conceded that Mahathir's decision would "weaken the party to an extent" but that he did not expect any of the ruling party's lawmakers to quit.

"Mahathir is a popular leader and there will be some impact from him quitting the party. But I don't foresee many party leaders following his footsteps," said Abdullah.

"If the members love Umno, they won't leave the party. I didn't quit the party despite all the difficulties I went through."

Asked whether he would step down to take responsibility for disastrous results in March 8 elections, he replied: "Why should I? I still have a lot of work to do."

"The important thing is that Umno has to remain calm and understand that its members have to be loyal to the party and be strong and continue to carry out the struggle," he said.

mahathir quits umno pc 190508 01Earlier today, in a a speech to about 1,200 people in Alor Star, Mahathir said his decision to leave Umno was prompted by his lack of confidence in Abdullah.

He also urged other Umno members and cabinet members to follow suit.

"I am quitting Umno today. I will only come back when there is a leadership change," Mahathir said.

"We can return to Umno when Abdullah steps down," he said in the speech in his home state of Kedah.

No need to ask him to reconsider

At the quick press conference, Abdullah also ruled out meeting Mahathir to ask him to reconsider his decision.

"He has clearly thought this through and there is no need to meet him on this," said Abdullah.

However, he expects the matter to be discussed at the party's next supreme council meeting.

During the tussle for power between Mahathir and then party vice-president Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah in 1987, Abdullah had supported the prince from Kelantan.

After Umno was declared 'illegal' by the Federal Court, Mahathir formed Umno Baru and transferred all the assets from the defunct party to the new entity. Over time, the word 'Baru' was also surreptitiously dropped from the new party.

Meanwhile, Razaleigh formed a splinter party, Semangat 46, but Abdullah took his chances with Mahathir.

This culminated in a series of ministerial positions from education to foreign minister before he was picked by Mahathir to succeed him.

However, the two had a falling out following Abdullah's decision to cancel the 'crooked bridge' project linking Johor to Singapore.

This led to a series of scathing criticisms by Mahathir which took a new lease of life after the recent elections that saw the ruling Barisan Nasional losing five states and its two-thirds majority in Parliament.

Najib ready to meet Mahathir

Meanwhile Bernama quoted deputy president Najib Abdul Razak as saying that he would continue to discuss with Abdullah on efforts to strengthen the party and the issue of Umno's leadership transition.

He also urged party members to remain calm following Mahathir's sudden decision to quit the party and urged them to have faith in the current leadership to reform the party.

Najib, who is also the chairperson of Umno's management committee, said he had contacted Abdullah himself and several other leaders over the matter.

"Mahathir's contributions to Umno and the country are immeasurable," he said from Egypt where he is attending the World Economic Forum.

Najib added that he had recently met Mahathir and was willing to meet him again to discuss this latest action of his.