

Umno MPs remain united behind Abdullah
Malaysiakini.com
May 20, 2008
Chan Kok Leong

Abdullah Ahmad Badawi held an emergency 35-minute meeting today with Umno MPs in Parliament to discuss the latest crisis that hit the party - the shock resignation of former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad.
MCPX

abdullah ahmad badawi pm mahathir quits umno pc 190508 01The Umno president did not speak to reporters after the meeting but Pontian member of Parliament Ahmad Mazlan said that Abdullah had discussed about Mahathir's sudden resignation from the party for the first five minutes only.

Abdullah, who is also prime minister, dedicated the rest of the meeting to other matters involving the party and the revival of the Umno Parliamentarians Group.

Ahmad, also the Barisan Backbenchers Club information chief, said that there were no calls made by the parliamentarians for Abdullah to step down. He added that the MPs had expressed their support for Abdullah.

On the Umno Parliamentarians Group, Ahmad said it would be headed by Anifah Aman, who is the Kimanis MP. He will also be tasked with representing the Umno MPs in Parliament.

Anifah, who is Sabah Chief Minister Musa's brother, had earlier declined to accept the deputy minister post from Abdullah because he had expected a more senior appointment.

Mukhriz absent

mukhriz mahathirOne notable absentee from the meeting was Jerlun MP and Mahathir's son Mukhriz. He is expected to call for a press conference later this evening to explain his stand on his fathers' resignation.

Other notable absentees were Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak (who is at the World Economic Forum in Egypt) and International Trade and Industry Minister Muhyiddin Yassin (who is leading a trade and investment mission in the United States).

Mahathir yesterday announced that he was quitting the party in protest against Abdullah's weak leadership.

The former Umno president had urged other party members and leaders to follow him and return only when Abdullah has stepped down.

Abdullah yesterday rejected that call, adding that he had the support of the members and would continue to lead the party as he still had unfinished tasks.

At a press conference after the meeting, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department and Umno parliamentarian Mohd Nazri Abdul Aziz said that all Umno MPs had pledged their allegiance to Abdullah.

"No one is bigger than the party and we (Umno MPs) just want to move on. We have also given our support to Abdullah to continue as party chief," he said.

"Nobody has the right to use this dirty tactic to bring down a leader who was democratically elected. That is blackmailing the party."

Nazri said Mahathir's challenge to other members to follow him in quitting Umno was a "test of faith" for Umno MPs.

"For those who see this party as being frail, I can say that this situation will strengthen our resolve. No one will leave Umno," he said.

The premier is expected to hold another meeting tomorrow with BN MPs and ministers to discuss and debate the impact of Mahathir's resignation.

Rais: Next few weeks will be crucial

Senior voices in the party have urged Mahathir and Abdullah, who fell out soon after the succession took place in 2003, to meet and resolve their row which threatens to destroy the party.

"That should be the best, although it's rather... late," Foreign Minister Rais Yatim in Singapore told AFP.

rais yatim 03 "The next few weeks would be crucial on how many would follow his footsteps. There is this need now... to act systematically so that Umno will not disintegrate," he said.

"I wish to say that for those who just want to say that it's okay, business as usual, those shouldn't be the words."

Top Umno members and political commentators have warned that if the beleaguered party suffers mass resignations, Abdullah will be forced to call fresh elections.

With the opposition in control of five states and a third of parliamentary seats after the March 8 polls, and now claiming it has the support of enough defectors to seize power shortly, that is considered a high-risk strategy.

"Fresh general elections will only be held if there are huge crossovers to the opposition," Nazri said.

Meanwhile, share prices on the Malaysian bourse fell 1.0 percent today, as the political concerns dampened sentiment.

"People are worried about the potential fallout from Mahathir's resignation," said N Kaladher, head of research at TA Securities. "We are looking at a down trend until this thing settles down."