

PM appeals for support
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Embattled Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi appealed for the nation's support in a Merdeka day message today, in the face of economic woes and opposition plans to topple the government within weeks.
MCPX

Abdullah, whose Barisan Nasional coalition has ruled since independence from Britain 51 years ago, led the nation in celebrations with a firework display last night.

abdullah ahmad badawi pm mahathir quits umno pc 190508 03The premier, who has faced calls to quit from within his own party after failing to check the rise of the opposition led by Anwar Ibrahim, urged the country to remain united as it faced high inflation and a global slowdown.

"I am confident and believe that all the trials we are facing today can be overcome if we remain united and work together with firm determination," he said.

"A united people is the country's strongest line of defence in facing any situation both internally and externally."

"No one citizen is recognised as being of a higher position than another in this nation. This nation belongs to all of us. Whether we rise or fall depends on all of us," he said.

Popular support crumbled

Abdullah's popular support has crumbled since he came to power in 2003, and the coalition was dealt its worst ever setback in March general elections that handed the opposition five states and a third of parliamentary seats.

anwar thanks voter speech at samagagah 300808.jpgAnwar, a former deputy premier who was sacked and jailed a decade ago, returned to parliament last week after winning a by-election in a landslide, and said he would oust the government by mid-September.

He has accused the government of corruption and poor management of the economy, and blamed Abdullah's weak leadership for the steep rise in inflation and falling investment.

Anwar has promised to slash fuel prices if he becomes premier, in a powerful gesture after Abdullah's 41 percent overnight hike announced in June triggered widespread anger and street protests.

The rise in fuel costs helped inflation spike to a 27-year high in July of 8.5 percent.

Anwar: We're once again at crossroads

"Now 51 years after independence, we are once again at a junction. We see the constitution being manipulated, democracy trampled on and the institution of the state made into a tool for power," Anwar said in a statement.

"It is time Malaysians made that choice to return the meaning of independence to this country."

Thousands gathered in the city centre late yesterday for colourful celebrations, singing rousing patriotic songs and waving the Malaysian flag as they counted down to independence day.

The skies of Kuala Lumpur lit up with fireworks on the stroke of midnight, but the cost was borne by sponsors as the government scaled back its spending in tune with the tighter economic times.

Abdullah last Friday offered tax cuts and perks in a 2009 budget designed to restore support for the beleaguered coalition and spur growth.

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