

PM may step down before 2010
Malaysiakini.com
Sept 17, 2008

Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who faces an opposition bid to seize power, said today he might step down before a planned handover to his deputy in mid-2010.

In a move seen as an attempt to quell any rebellion in the ruling party as his popularity fades, Abdullah also said he was passing his finance portfolio to deputy premier Najib Razak with immediate effect.

The premier said he and his deputy were committed to their transition plan, which has been criticised within the ruling party as undemocratic, but that the mid-2010 deadline could be brought forward.

"I will decide when I want to go... I will not be staying more than 2010," Abdullah told a press conference.

"If I should want to go earlier, that is flexible. That is the flexibility we have arranged," he said of the deal forged with Najib after disastrous March elections that triggered calls for him to quit.

"It depends on the progress of the role I am giving to Najib. Let's see what he can do."

PM forced to rethink handover date

There had been speculation that Najib and other figures in the ruling party were preparing to challenge Abdullah, whose popularity has tumbled due to a weakening economy and broken promises for reform.

abdullah ahmad badawi najib razak pc change portfolio 170908 02Najib welcomed Abdullah's move and said it showed "his commitment to me as his replacement."

However, he was noncommittal when asked how he would respond if the ruling party's grassroots nominated him for the top job in upcoming internal elections. "We leave it to the party," he said.

James Chin, a political analyst from Monash University's campus in Kuala Lumpur, said Abdullah had been forced to rethink the handover date because of a groundswell against him in the ruling party.

"The pressure is building up and it is getting to him," he said.