

PM under pressure to quit by Oct 9
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The Umno supreme council which met yesterday saw several of its senior members demanding party president Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to step down before Oct 9.

According to reliable sources, they asked Abdullah to hand over the reigns to his deputy Najib Abdul Razak by that deadline so as 'to save Abdullah from the embarrassment' of failing to get enough nominations to contest the party presidency.

The proponents of an early exit, feel Abdullah might not get the 58 nominations necessary from the 191 divisions - during their respective annual general meetings scheduled between Oct 9 to Nov 9.

Umno's constitution requires presidential candidates to acquire the said number from divisions nationwide.

Should Abdullah step down as party president by Oct 9, it would also mean by convention he will relinquish his premiership - as the Umno president heads the ruling BN coalition.

Muhyiddin leads the charge

According to sources, at least five supreme council members - including three ministers - spoke against Abdullah's self-imposed 2010 transition deadline to step down.

It is said vice-president Muhyiddin Yassin is leading the chorus for him to quit - who has said previously 2010 was 'too long' - joined by Wanita chief Rafidah Aziz.

"Others also wanted to speak up but they were cut short by Najib who said the matter should be left to be discussed between him and Abdullah," a source informed Malaysiakini.

Anticipating 'heavy weather' at yesterday's meeting, Abdullah had on Wednesday announced his finance portfolio swap with Najib's defence.

The move was seen as Abdullah reassuring Najib of his successor status and appeasing the grassroots who want the deputy prime minister to replace him immediately.

During the announcement, Abdullah intimated that the 2010 power transition pact is "flexible" and that he might quit sooner.

While accepting the arrangement, Najib has been non-committal on whether he will run for the top post if he receives enough presidential nominations from the divisions - as he has said he will leave it to the party to decide.

Abdullah, who is believed to be under even more intense pressure after yesterday's meeting, dropped further early exit hints like "keep my ears close to the ground" and that he will discuss further with Najib on the transition plan.

Muhyiddin also told reporters later that there were a number of supreme council members who kept quiet during the meeting and they were treated as being agreeable to Abdullah's

2010 transition plan.

Najib cancels overseas trips

Abdullah has been facing quit calls since the BN coalition's general election debacle in March.

It escalated with serious Umno infighting and Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim's challenge to form a new government soon.

Amid the political uncertainties, Najib has cancelled his scheduled trip to Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. He was supposed to leave the country today.

However, he still expected to attend - departing on Sept 24 - the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

An aide of the deputy premier has been reported to have dismissed claims that his trip cancellation was due to the political situation in the country.

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