

**PM unfazed by 'quit now' calls**  
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Despite pressure from some party members to step down, Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has decided to dig in and run for the Umno presidency while his deputy, Najib Abdul Razak, will go for the number two post.

A source told Malaysiakini the 68-year old Abdullah had taken into account the views of several high-level Umno leaders who last week urged him to quit in favour of Najib by Oct 9.

Nevertheless, the source said, after doing their 'maths', Abdullah and his deputy have decided to go for it as a team.

"The PM and Najib are together," the source said. "The trust and bond they have is unshaken. They are moving together in getting grassroots to reaffirm their support for the transition plan."

At a meeting last week, five members of the party's supreme council - including three cabinet ministers - spoke against a pact made between the prime minister and his deputy whereby the former would hand over the premiership and Umno presidency to the latter in June 2010.

umno party post polls quotaThey argued Abdullah - under pressure to fend off a growing challenge from opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim - might not secure the minimum 58 nominations needed from 191 party divisions to make a bid for the top post.

Divisional annual meetings are due to take place between Oct 9 to Nov 9.

Such an unprecedented result would not only be embarrassing for Abdullah but might split the already bitterly divided party even more, the dissenters said.

Abdullah, also known by his short name of Pak Lah, inherited the post from former premier and ex-Umno president Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

His former mentor turned foe is now leading a camp that includes Umno vice president Muhyiddin Yassin and Gua Musang MP Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah to oust him.

**Done their homework**

But according to the source, Abdullah was confident his popularity within the party was intact despite several recent controversies that have sparked public outcry and rocked his administration.

"Yes, the headcount has reinforced what they believed, that support for the PM has not been diminished," the source said. "Therefore, there is no change whatsoever to the plan."

Abdullah moved quickly last week to nip in the bud growing dissent over his leadership by conceding greater power to Najib.

He surprised the nation by handing over his coveted finance portfolio to Najib, in exchange for the latter's defence minister post.

Pak Lah also promised to consider retiring earlier than 2010 if Najib performed well.

Najib is the eldest son of Malaysia's second prime minister, Abdul Razak, who introduced the New Economic Policy in the 1970s to benefit and protect Malay rights.

### **Tough to beat**

Party watchers also believe the 61-year old Najib, who wields substantial grassroots support, might be more effective in curtailing the growing strength of Anwar, who has threatened to topple the Umno-led Barisan Nasional government soon.

Analysts said while the situation in Umno - the country's most powerful political party - was still fluid, an Abdullah-Najib pairing might be tough to beat.

"Some divisions are expected to nominate other candidates but if Najib sticks with Abdullah, they are a formidable team. This is the power of incumbency," political analyst Khoo Kay Peng had told Malaysiakini.

Meanwhile, Muhyiddin, who is also international trade and industry minister, has stepped up the campaign to dislodge his boss.

"It is a situation which is very serious. It is of concern not only to Umno members but to the country at large, to the Barisan Nasional and people who cares about what is happening to the government," he told a press conference today.

"If nothing happens then I am not too sure if the lifespan of Barisan Nasional, of Umno in particular, can sustain beyond the year 2013," he said, referring to the scheduled date of the next general election.

If Abdullah and Najib stick to their latest plan to fight as team for the top two posts, then Muhyiddin - if he still wants to make a challenge - may be left with little choice but to team up with either 71-year-old Tengku Razaleigh or perhaps Foreign Minister Rais Yatim.