

**Abdullah - will he stay or go?**  
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Embattled Umno president Abdullah Ahmad Badawi is said to have decided to defend his post after a three-hour meeting with his supporters that dragged into the wee hours of the morning.

However, this has been disputed by an insider who insisted that Abdullah is set to announce his departure, as has been widely speculated since the beginning of the week.

In a posting on his blog, Umno leader Ruhanie Ahmad said the meeting, which started at about 11pm, was held at the prime minister's official residence in Putrajaya.

Ruhanie, a former Backbenchers Club chairperson and three-term Parit Sulong parliamentarian, said some 200 supporters had attended the meeting, including staunch supporters of Umno vice-president Mohd Ali Rustam, who is set to contest the No 2 post himself.

"Abdullah is expected to announce his decision to stay on at the BN special supreme council meeting scheduled for 3.30pm today. I hope this information will become reality in line with the spirit and practice of democracy in Umno," read the posting.

The premier, who took over the reins of the party and nation in 2003, has come under intense pressure to step down since the ruling coalition's dismal showing in the March 8 polls.

Albeit subtly, Abdullah has agreed that it is time for him to go and he initially drafted a power transition plan that would see him hand over the baton to his deputy Najib Abdul Razak by June 2010.

In recent weeks, however, Abdullah has faced greater pressure to speed up the handover, leading to a new pact with Najib (left in photo) to bring forward his date of departure.

Umno polls were then moved from Dec 19 to next March, but it has not appeased detractors from pressing for his earlier exit.

Abdullah however has remained silent on whether or not he will defend his post in the party polls.

### **'No change to plan'**

Confirming that the meeting did take place, an influential Umno insider however told Malaysiakini that the meeting was nothing but a "casual meeting".

"He has made up his mind. He will step down. I don't think Abdullah decided this morning that he would defend his post," said the source.

Abdullah had a series of meetings yesterday with his supporters who pleaded for him to defend his post.

barisan nasional Rumours persist that all BN component party leaders will endorse Abdullah's decision if he stays in his post as Umno president and, by virtue of that, as prime minister.

The source insisted, however, that this is "most unlikely" to happen as many BN leaders are dissatisfied with his performance.

"His execution of his reform plans is slow and many BN leaders are unhappy. Like I said, he will step down as planned and not defend his post," stressed the source.

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