

Najib to become PM as nation faces crisis
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Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak will take over the reins of Umno and the country's top job at a time when the economy is confronting a global financial meltdown.

"He is going to become prime minister at a difficult time when the economy is not at its best. He will have to shoulder a lot of expectations from the people," said Mohammad Agus Yusoff from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

Najib, who is Umno deputy chief, has yesterday won the leadership of the ruling party unopposed, clearing the way for him to be appointed prime minister next March.

Mohammad Agus said Najib's elevation was inevitable after Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi identified him as the country's next premier.

"He received strong support because there isn't any other suitable candidate within Umno and nobody is brave enough to nominate other candidates, especially since he has been picked by Abdullah," he said.
Abdullah, who is being forced to step aside after a dismal performance in elections this year, has said he will hand over to his deputy at the Umno general assembly next year.

Najib swept the nominations from the party's 191 divisions nationwide, securing 140 so far and establishing an unassailable lead that prevents any challenger contesting for the job.

The only other contender, former finance minister Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, received just one nomination. Candidates must be nominated by at least 58 divisions to contest the post of Umno president.

"I thank members for their trust in me... I aspire to carry out the trust and responsibilities to the best of my abilities in addressing all the challenges faced by Umno and Barisan Nasional," Najib said.

Abdullah has been under intense pressure to quit since March when he led the coalition to its worst polls performance in half a century, losing a third of parliamentary seats and five states to the opposition.

The 68-year-old premier originally wanted to hand over to Najib in mid-2010 but was forced to review his departure date as he lost support from Umno's grassroots, which was shocked by the election debacle.

Hope that Najib can 'save' Umno

Ibrahim Suffian from the Merdeka Research Centre said the overwhelming support for Najib showed Umno members supported the power transition plan.

"What is interesting is how Najib performs and to what extent he can carry out reforms within the general electorate while balancing the demands of the party faithful," he told AFP.

"There is hope that he will be 'saving' Umno and extending their lifespan into the next

elections," he said.

Abdullah was punished by voters for failing to carry out promised reforms, including revamping the judiciary and police force, and ridding the country and the ruling party of corruption.

The electoral drubbing was so severe that some ruling party members have said Umno faces annihilation if it fails to revamp itself before the next polls.

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