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2 weeks later, Abdullah still fighting political fires

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Dispute with Palace over choice of Terengganu MB is latest controversy to plague the PM



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(Rocky Bru)

MORE than a fortnight after his coalition's worst showing in national elections, Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi is still fighting political fires.

The latest crisis - over the choice of the Terengganu Menteri Besar - could be the most trying for the Barisan Nasional chairman and Umno president.

He is up against the Terengganu palace (from where the present Malaysian King hails), which yesterday appointed Terengganu state assemblyman Ahmad Said instead of the premier's choice of reappointing Idris Jusoh as the MB.

It is believed that several Umno politicians close to the palace who were dropped by Idris from

the list of candidates for the general election are behind this effort to get Mr Idris out of the MB's office.

"In the history of Umno, never has the authority of the PM been so openly challenged by the Istana," said Umno veteran Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad.

"If PM Badawi is not able to appoint Idris, he's going to face a lot of problems with Umno. I dread to think, what next?" Tan Sri Abdullah told *my paper*.

The PM, who lost five states to the opposition and failed to secure the crucial two-thirds of Parliament in the March 8 general election, said earlier yesterday the appointment of Datuk Ahmad by the palace was "unconstitutional".

Both Tan Sri Abdullah and lawyer Jahaberdeen Mohd Yunus agree that the right to appoint the MB resides with the premier.

"The palace was right in Perlis but wrong in Terengganu," Mr Jahaberdeen said, referring to a somewhat similar crisis with the Perlis royalty last week.

Mr Jahaberdeen is of the



PROTEST: Supporters of Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh demanding he be appointed Menteri Besar of Terengganu instead the Palace's choice of Ahmad Said. (PHOTO: THE STAR)



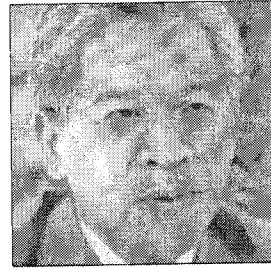
PALACE NOD: The Sultan chose Datuk Ahmad Said (left) as the new MB, snubbing Mr Idris Jusoh. (PHOTO: UTUSAN MALAYSIA/BERNAMA)

view that "the PM has no choice but to say that this is the inherent danger of royal activism when the rule of law is compromised".

Datuk Seri Abdullah had told some people before attending the F-1 race in Sepang that he has "sacked" Datuk Ahmad.

Later in the day, he met the 23 Umno assemblymen from Terengganu and said he was not going to give in the palace.

Talk is rife, however, that about half the people he met



may side with the Terengganu palace and attend the swearing-in of the MB, which has been rescheduled to tomorrow.

Terengganu, which receives about RM1 billion (\$436.5 million) in royalties for its offshore oil, has 32 state seats, eight of them won by the opposition Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS).

PAS would be more than happy to avail itself to form a mixed, simple majority government with Datuk Ahmad should he be sacked by BN and also get

the support of at least 8 of the 23 assemblymen.

Tan Sri Abdullah did not wish to speculate on that possibility.

"Either way, the PM's position will be precarious. If he doesn't get his way, he will be seen as weak. If he gets to do it his way and make Idris the MB, he will have problems with the Palace after this."

The new de facto Law Minister, Datuk Zaid Ibrahim, told *my paper* he did not have full details of the saga, "but it does look like there's a concerted effort by some people".

HELPPDESK 我的字典

↗ **Unconstitutional:**
违反宪法的
wéi fǎn xiàn fǎ de

↗ **Precarious:** 危险的
wēi xiǎn de

↗ **Concerted:** 一致的
yī zhì de