

DATE: 10/3/2008

# Step down, Dr M tells Abdullah

NST- 10/3/2008

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has urged Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to take full responsibility for the Barisan Nasional's electoral setback and step down as the coalition leader.

He said that in 2004 when the BN scored a huge win, Abdullah claimed 100 per cent credit for it.

"Now it is only fair that he takes 100 per cent responsibility for BN's poor showing by stepping down."

(Abdullah never claimed credit for the BN's big election victory. In fact, he thanked Dr Mahathir for having laid the groundwork and his colleagues for having worked hard to secure the victory.)

(It was then Umno secretary-general Tun Khalil Yaakob who said that the victory was 99.99 per cent due to Abdullah.)

(Dr Mahathir was upset over Khalil's statement because he felt he was not given any credit for having been at the helm of the country for 23 years until he retired. Tun Khalil is now Governor of Malacca.)

Yesterday, Dr Mahathir said if he was in Abdullah's shoes he would resign.

(It must be noted that when Dr Mahathir was challenged for the Umno presidency by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah in 1987, he said he would stay on even if he won by one vote. He won by a wafer-thin margin of 43 and resisted calls for his resignation, including from two former prime ministers — Tun Hussein Onn and the father of independence, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra.)

It must also be noted that it was Dr Mahathir who had handpicked Abdullah over Najib to be his successor after having had three previous deputy prime ministers.

The first, Tun Musa Hitam, resigned over "irreconcilable differences" with Dr Mahathir in 1986.

The second, the late Tun Ghafar Baba, was challenged by now Parti Keadilan Rakyat de facto leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who was tacitly backed by Dr Mahathir, and defeated in 1993.

In 1998, Dr Mahathir sacked Anwar and appointed Abdullah as

his deputy in early 1999. Abdullah's Islamic credentials and his Mr Clean image were seen as being able to stem the anger against Dr Mahathir for sacking Anwar.

Dr Mahathir said yesterday: "Just before polling day, he said BN was going to make a clean sweep.

"I do not understand how he could come to this decision. But he still believes that the opposition just wanted to deny us the two-thirds majority. That is why this is happening."

(Abdullah did not say the BN would make a clean sweep. He was quoted in *The Star* on March 8 as saying "I am confident that there is hope for the BN to win by a two-thirds majority.")

The only alternative, according to Dr Mahathir, was for Abdullah to step down. "A man who is responsible must show he is responsible."

The former prime minister, who has been critical of Abdullah for shelving some of the pet projects he introduced before he retired, has attacked Abdullah and his

family several times over the last two years.

Yesterday, Dr Mahathir said Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak was the best choice.

Asked if the timing of the general election was a miscalculation by BN, Dr Mahathir said even if the election was postponed for a year, people's pent up frustrations would increase.

With the poor showing, he predicted there would be instability for some time. "But if the opposition is good, they should be able to remedy the situation."

Dr Mahathir said with such a weak government, it would be difficult to manage the economy well.

He claimed that the resentment was not confined to one particular race. "All the communities showed their disappointment."

(In 1999, after Dr Mahathir sacked Anwar, Malay votes turned against the government. The BN won owing to support from the Chinese and Indian voters. Dr Mahathir, who was then president of Umno, the party of the Malays, did not offer to resign.)