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PM to announce decision today or tomorrow

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KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi will announce whether he will defend the Umno presidency today, or tomorrow at the latest.

The prime minister said he would chair a Barisan Nasional supreme council meeting to inform party component leaders of his decision beforehand.

"Wait first, why so impatient," was his reply to the question of when he would make the announcement.

He had said earlier that he would decide by Thursday, the day Umno divisions begin proposing candidates for the party's top positions.

Addressing a packed press conference after chairing a meeting of the Biotechnology International Advisory Panel at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre, Ab-

dullah said he was arranging a BN council meeting tomorrow.

"Our colleagues in the BN have indicated that they would like to be briefed on what we (in Umno) are doing.

"They want to be in the know, as by convention, the Umno president is also the BN chairman. So, they would like to have some information what is going to happen."

At an Umno supreme council meeting on Sept 26, Abdullah said the plan for him to step down in favour of his deputy, Datuk Seri Najib Razak, in June 2010 was to be brought forward to next year.

Anticipating that he would leave office soon, a number of candidates have announced their intention to run for key positions in the party elections in March, including that of deputy president.

Abdullah, however, dismissed

the idea that the candidates for deputy president may have jumped the gun.

"It is their choice whether they want to announce it early or wait. It is entirely up to them."

He was asked if the unprecedented situation of having a number of aspirants for the deputy presidency was healthy for the party. He said there were bound to be withdrawals sooner or later.

"Believe me, after a while, some of them will drop out and in the end, maybe only two or even one will be left."

Asked what would be his focus in his remaining days as prime minister, regardless of when he decides to leave, Abdullah said he would use the time to make good on his promises to the rakyat.

"There are uncompleted things, such as reforms I promised the

rakyat.

"I will undertake them. Of course, I have to do it because what I promised, I will deliver."

Abdullah said in the case of judicial reforms, there should not be an assumption that they had stopped just because former de facto law minister Datuk Zaid Ibrahim was no longer in the cabinet.

"I know Zaid is not around any more but it does not mean everything has to stop."

He made it clear that the government's plans for legal reforms were not up to Zaid alone.

"It was not his idea in the first place. It was mine, and it was in the 2004 (general election) manifesto, remember?"

Zaid resigned last month in protest of the government's use of the Internal Security Act.