

Pak Lah under pressure to exit

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Umno wants PM to expedite power transition plan

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PETALING JAYA: The Prime Minister is under pressure to fast-forward the transition plan that would have seen him handing over power to his deputy in 2010.

Umno supreme council members had reportedly told Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in their meeting on Thursday that the political situation was not improving and that he should consider an earlier exit.

At the same time, Abdullah's supporters are rallying around him to ask him to stick to the transition plan and defend his president's post, if need be.

Home Minister and supreme council member Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar revealed that Abdullah listened intently and asked for time to discuss the matter with Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

"He is conscious of the wishes of the grassroots and he said he is willing to exercise flexibility.

"I don't think there is any necessity to talk about applying pressure. Let him make the decision," said Syed Hamid.

The minister said Abdullah was also aware of the time line — Oct 9 — when Umno divisions will begin their annual meetings to nominate candidates for party posts, including those for the president and deputy president.

Five supreme council members spoke during the closed-door meeting, four explaining the need for a quicker exit plan saying that it would not be feasible for the party president to stay beyond December when the party convenes for the General Assembly.

The four were vice-president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, Youth chief Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun



Festive special

Abdullah presenting Hari Raya goodies to Ramli Osman at the Al-Imam Ash-Shafei mosque in Taman Maluri, Kuala Lumpur. With him are wife Datin Serri Jeanne Abdullah and Datin Anna Razak.

Hussein, Wanita chief Tan Sri Rafidah Aziz and supreme council member Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal, who is Unity, Culture, Arts and Heritage Minister.

Rafidah is said to have told Abdullah that Wanita grassroots members had informed her that he might not even be able to secure the minimum 58 nominations required to defend his presidency. Her no-holds barred approach caused several of those present to ask her to tone down.

Kelantan Umno chief Tan Sri Annuar Musa was the only one who spoke up for Abdullah, criticising those asking him to go.

He reminded the two top leaders that they had committed themselves to the 2010 transition plan.

Several more were about to speak but Najib, noticing that Abdullah was visibly affected, stepped in and ended the discussion, saying that those who spoke had made their point. He asked that Abdullah and him be allowed to take the discussion to a more "private level."

Deputy Health Minister Datuk Dr Abdul Latif Ahmad said the supreme council must be informed about details of the transition because "this is not a private love affair between two people."

"We should not be kept in the dark because it affects the country, Barisan Nasional and Umno," he told *The Star*.

Analyst Datuk Seri Annuar Zaini said a captain needed accurate information to negotiate stormy seas.

"The decision lies with Pak Lah and it is good he knows the situation on the ground," he said.

A senior member of the supreme council has been tasked by the others to meet Abdullah soon to secure a more definite answer from him.

Datuk Alwi Che Ahmad, the Prime Minister's political secretary, said of now, Abdullah stood by the 2010 transition plan.

At the Selangor Umno liaison committee meeting yesterday, 20 of the 22 divisions wanted state party chief Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib to ask Abdullah "to have a big heart and accept that the political situation calls for change."

They also called for a smooth and graceful transition that will not involve a contest for the top post.