

Former Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak said Saturday he was going to take a "short break" after his election loss, as an angry crowd descended on an airport amid speculation he would fly out of the country.

Reports had circulated on social media that Najib and his wife Rosmah Mansor were due to board a private jet and fly to Indonesia.



Former Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak said Saturday he was going to take a "short break" after his shock election loss. AFP / MOHD RASFAN

Najib's long-ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition suffered a shock loss in an election to an alliance headed by Mahathir Mohamad, 92, himself a former premier who came back to take on his ex-protege Najib.

Since his defeat, there has been speculation Najib and his wife might try to flee the country as the new government has vowed to investigate a massive financial scandal that the ex-leader has been implicated in.

In a series of early morning tweets, Najib said: "I will take a short break to spend time with my family whom I have not seen enough of in recent years.

"I pray that after this divisive period, the country will unite.

"I apologize for any shortcomings and mistakes, and I thank you, the people, for the opportunity to lead our great nation."

He did not give further details about his plans.

About 40 members of the public, accompanied by a large pack of journalists, descended on Subang Airport, a small airport just outside the capital in the early hours. Riot police were stationed outside the gate where people believed Najib would enter.

It came after what was believed to be a manifest circulated online showing Najib and his wife were due to board a flight from the airport to Jakarta on Saturday morning.

Angry crowd

A white van with heavily tinted windows arrived and was quickly surrounded by an angry crowd who demanded that the vehicle is opened so they could see who was inside.

They tried to rock the vehicle and one man shouted: "I hate Rosmah". The ex-leaders wife is hugely unpopular, due to her imperious manner and a reported love of luxury shopping trips.

But someone rolled down the van's window to show Najib was not inside, prompting the crowd to back off and allow the vehicle to enter the airport.

Businessman Raja Singham, 49, who had tried to block the van from entering, said: "We have the right to know who is inside the car, as a citizen I will fight for that. We have suffered for so many years. I don't want them to get out of the country."

Some media reports earlier said the pair were on a travel blacklist and would not be allowed to leave.

But the immigration department's director-general Mustafar Ali told AFP: "They are not blacklisted so far."

Mahathir's victory broke the grip on power of Najib's Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition, which had ruled Malaysia uninterrupted since independence from Britain in 1957.

Najib's premiership was battered by allegations he oversaw the plundering of billions of dollars from sovereign wealth fund 1MDB.

The US State Department has alleged in civil lawsuits that \$4.5 billion was looted from the fund in an audacious scheme of fraud and money-laundering, and was used to buy everything from artworks to a high-end real estate in the United States.

Najib and the fund deny any wrongdoing.

Mahathir, who is the world's oldest elected leader, has said that the king has agreed to pardon jailed leading politician Anwar Ibrahim, his former nemesis turned ally.

This would pave the way for Anwar's return to politics and to potentially become premier

later.

Anwar was heir-apparent to Mahathir until they had a dramatic falling out, and Mahathir sacked him in 1998, and he was subsequently jailed. He was released but he was imprisoned again under Najib's rule in 2015.

AFP

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