

New Zealand minister denies bid to topple prime minister

New Zealand's Trade and Defence Minister Phil Goff denied Tuesday that he would make a bid to oust the prime minister as their Labour Party faces defeat at the election due later this year.

Goff, who is ranked at number three in Prime Minister Helen Clark's cabinet, caused a stir when he conceded to reporters that the Labour, which has headed minority governments since 1999, could lose power in the poll due by mid-November.

'We start in the underdog position,' he said. 'People think there is ... time for a change. It happens after several terms.'

An opinion poll published at the weekend showed Labour trailing the opposition conservative National Party by 56 percent to 29 percent in voter support.

Political observers said Goff had defied convention for a sitting cabinet minister by accepting that the government could lose an election, but Goff said later, 'I am confident Labour is in with a very good chance to win.'

'There is always the prospect of any party losing an election, of course that is what an election is about.'

Goff, who has long been seen as a prospective Labour leader, said Clark had '100 percent support' from him and his colleagues in the parliamentary party.

'The question of leadership will take place at the point in the future when Helen Clark feels that she is going to move on to something else,' he said. 'That point has not arisen. We are not looking at losing the election.'

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