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Abdullah recalls opposition to Anwar candidacy in polls

BUKIT MERTAJAM, Sun. - Making the revelation for the first time, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi spoke of Permatang Pauh Umno members' stiff opposition to Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim contesting as Barisan Nasional candidate in the constituency during the 1982 general election.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Umno vice-president said members were vehemently against Anwar's candidacy because they believed that he was anti-Umno and anti-Government.

As Penang Umno liaison committee chairman then, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir had approached Abdullah on the matter.

Abdullah, the Penang Umno chief, recalled that Dr Mahathir had said that it was better if Anwar contested the general election with Umno.

"However, Permatang Pauh Umno division members were strongly against Anwar," he told reporters after holding a pep talk on the general election for members of BN component parties in the Permatang Pauh parliamentary constituency.

Also present were Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon and Permatang Pauh Umno division acting chairman Datuk Ahmad Saad.

Abdullah said Permatang Pauh Umno division members told him then that there was no need for Umno to "fear" Anwar.

"They said if Anwar stood on a Pas ticket or for another opposition party, Anwar would lose anyway," he said, "and that they would work hard to ensure the BN's victory."

But history would have it that Anwar went on to contest and win the seat.

However, it came with a price - the Umno members in the constituency were "very upset" with Abdullah, who acknowledged the sentiments then.

Based on that experience, Abdullah said there was no reason why Permatang Pauh Umno division members should stop their strong support for Barisan Nasional.

"Despite their strong opposition to Anwar's candidacy then, they continued to support Dr Mahathir's decision," he said. "Although Anwar is no longer in Umno, Permatang Pauh Umno division members should continue to give their full support to Umno and Barisan."

Abdullah also stressed on the importance of a very old democratic adage - the interest of many must always take precedence over the individual.

"Don't get excited over a person or a leader," he said. "He alone cannot achieve success for the people. He does so through the party."

Earlier, Abdullah spoke on several issues including Anwar being jailed for six years for corruption and the BN's preparation for the coming general election.

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