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`Results of by-elections do not indicate capability'

PENDANG, Wed. - Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Barisan Nasional's performance in the Anak Bukit and Pendang by-elections could not be used to determine his capability as the country's future leader.

He said this when asked by reporters that the by-election results would reflect how people reacted to the announcement that he would become Prime Minister after Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad stepped down in October next year.

Abdullah said the by-elections had nothing to do with the issue of his leadership as he had also been given big roles to play during previous by-elections.

"I've always been given the responsibility to lead whenever there are by-elections," he told reporters at Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Pendang after the BN candidate for Pendang, Datuk Othman Abdul, filed his nomination papers.

Abdullah said a BN victory in the by-elections would send a clear message that people living under Pas wanted to switch their support to the BN. He said this was the important factor which BN wanted to see from the by-elections.

Abdullah said chances of BN victory were good as the constituents were familiar with the candidates.

Asked why Umno was fielding a candidate who lost in the 1999 general elections to contest in Pendang, he said it was not that there was a dearth of candidates but that the candidates selected "are the best as they are experienced and the people also know them well".

Othman was defeated by the late Pas president Datuk Fadzil Mohd Noor in the last general election by a majority of 2,934 votes.