

Gerakan: Anwar not a factor in poll date decision
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The government has more important things to do than consider whether former deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim will contest in the general elections, said Gerakan vice-president S Vijayaratnam.

He was responding to Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's statement that Anwar's eligibility to contest should not be a factor in calling for elections.

In a statement today, Vijayaratnam (right) said Gerakan fully supported this stand.

"This is a responsible government and its first priority is to improve the lot of the people. This will be accomplished with the implementation of the Ninth Malaysia Plan and Industrial Master Plan 3," he added.

A news report today quoted Abdullah as saying that the return of Anwar to active politics next year would not tempt him to call for an early elections.

He was responding to widespread speculation that an election will be called by the end of this year although it is not due until 2009.

This is because Anwar's ban from active politics will expire in April 2008.

Unfinished business

Speaking in an interview with Reuters and CNBC, Abdullah refused to rule out a snap polls but said he still has unfinished business from the last polls in March 2004.

Anwar, who is currently the advisor of opposition Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), was sacked from his posts as deputy prime minister and finance minister in 1998 by then premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He was subsequently convicted for corruption and sodomy. He was released in 2004 after spending six years in prison when the Federal Court quashed his sodomy conviction.

However, elections laws prohibit him from returning to active politics until after April 2008 in view of his first conviction. The ban took effect from the day he completed his first sentence on April 15, 2003.

Political observers believe that Anwar's return to active politics could pose a problem for the Barisan Nasional (BN) as the charismatic leader is still popular, especially among the Malay electorate.

Meanwhile, Vijayaratnam said many prominent and senior leaders have abandoned PKR since its inception.

"The whole opposition is unable to come to terms with each other and cannot mount a serious threat to the BN," he added

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