

Anwar's speech cut short by cops
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Former deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim today complained about police harassment and phantom voters as a key by-election campaign intensified.

Anwar was sacked and jailed by former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad, but is staging a political comeback and leading the opposition campaign in the ballot in rural Ijok constituency in Selangor.

"Two of my rallies were stopped by the police late Tuesday. They say we need to have a police permit," he told reporters.

Both the Parti Keadilan Rakyat, which he advises, and the ruling Barisan Nasional see Saturday's vote as a key test ahead of general elections expected before 2009.

Late Tuesday, at the Tuan Mee palm oil estate, just south of Ijok, police told Anwar's supporters that the rally was illegal. Anwar cut short his speech, saying he did not want to court trouble with the police.

"This is an election. You do not need a permit," he said.

Look out for phantom voters

The former deputy premier also expressed concern about phantom voters.

"Beware of phantom voters. Thirty-one of the some 12,000 voters are aged 100 and above. This is a world record. There is also a voter aged eight years-old," he said. Malaysians can vote if they are 21-years and above," he said.

Anwar said party officials had complained to the Election Commission.

"I think BN is worried they may lose. So the authorities are getting tough. Right now, if the elections are conducted fairly, we will win," he said.

A state lawmaker's death earlier this month precipitated the by-election in the constituency of 12,372 voters. The ruling coalition won by 1,649 votes over PKR in 2004.

Ijok was once an agricultural-based constituency of rubber and oil palm estates, but is undergoing transition. Many people now work in factories outside the area.

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