

Najib rejects vote fraud allegation
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Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak today dismissed opposition claims of fraud in the Ijok by-election that was won by the ruling coalition.

Anwar Ibrahim, an outspoken former deputy prime minister trying to make a political comeback, had alleged intimidation and fraud in the by-election, which had been seen as a litmus test ahead of national polls next year.

But Najib rejected the claims and said the vote for the state legislative seat in Ijok in central Selangor state - won by the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition - had been fair.

"Democracy is very much alive under Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's leadership.

"This is very evident following the by-elections in Ijok where the opposition had all the freedom to campaign," Najib told reporters.

The poll for the tiny state seat was widely touted as a test of popularity for both the government and Anwar's opposition Parti Keadilan Rakyat, ahead of a general election expected before 2009.

It also marked Anwar's first major return to Malaysian politics since he was released from jail in 2004.

He had been sacked by former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 1998 and charged with corruption and sodomy.

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