

PM denies pay rise linked to election
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Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has flatly denied that a hefty pay rise for the country's one million civil servants is linked to winning votes in the next election.

"Whatever we do is linked to election... as though we work only for the election," he said in dismissing suggestions that the salary increase was given to woo voters in the next general election, late yesterday.

The prime minister is currently visiting Japan.

Defending the move, Abdullah said that the government's financial position allowed it to give the salary hike.

We can afford it

"We can afford it now. So what's wrong with giving (a salary increase)? We want to give (a pay rise). Why should we wait any longer?" he asked.

Abdullah said civil servants had been waiting for the pay boost for a long time.

Abdullah announced pay rises of up to 35 percent Monday in a move that will cost an additional eight billion ringgit annually.

Opposition leaders said Abdullah may call for a snap election as early as the third quarter of this year as he comes under attack from former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad for poor leadership.

A poll is not due until early 2009.

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