

Pak Lah in KT early because he's 'free'
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Andrew Ong

Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has joined in the Kuala Terengganu by-election campaign barely three days after it started because he had the free time. So he said.

Abdullah arrived at the Kuala Terengganu airport at about 3.45pm today before making way to the Tuanku Abdul Rahman hall for a meeting with the Barisan Nasional election machinery representatives.

And at a press conference later, Abdullah argued that his early visit was a matter of convenience.

"I happen to have some free time so I came really quickly. After this, I have to go somewhere else - the Middle East... if I don't come now, I may be busy later and people will say Pak Lah didn't help (the campaign)," he said with a smile.

By convention, the BN chairperson rarely takes part in a by-election campaign, leaving his deputy with a free reign as the campaign leader.

Outgoing BN chief Abdullah had mostly stuck to this tradition in his five years at the helm, save for fleeting visits during the tail-end of the hotly contested Pengkalan Pasir (2005), Ijok (2007) and Permatang Pauh (2008) by-elections.

Expectedly, his early visit has set the rumour mill churning.

Some believe that Abdullah was here early to prevent the warring Umno factions from disrupting the by-election campaign.

But the premier insisted that it was all due his overseas trips.

Dr M? Irrelevant!

To a question at the press conference, Abdullah also brushed aside claims by former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad that BN candidate Wan Ahmad Farid was a proxy candidate.

"Dr Mahathir can say anything. It is irrelevant to us. We know what we're doing. We know what we want and we're going to fight hard to win," he said in an angry tone.

Wan Ahmad was Abdullah's political secretary when he was home minister in 2003.

When asked on the level of support for Wan Ahmad from the Chinese community, Abdullah said party workers had to increase efforts in responding to the community's concerns.

"At this stage, from what I know, the support is there. What's needed are explanations for their queries and doubts. We will leave this to (the party) machinery," he said.

The 8,787 Chinese voters are said to be the kingmakers in this contest and a lot of resources are being spent to canvass for their votes.

Wan Farid taking great risk

On his meeting with representatives from the party machinery, Abdullah said he had explained to them that Wan Ahmad was taking a great political risk by accepting his candidacy.

"I told him that if you don't win, you will lose your post as a senator and deputy minister.

"I told him that he cannot come back to me and become a political secretary. I told him about the risks early on, when I heard that he may be nominated as a candidate," he said.

Abdullah said that he wanted the party machinery to know that the candidate was a serious one and will become a good elected representative.

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