

Abdullah sees no reason to seek fresh mandate

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PUTRAJAYA: The Prime Minister said yesterday that he has no reason to go to the ballot box.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi argued that the huge mandate he received in 2004 was intact, and made clear that his focus was on making good his promises to the electorate.

Since the Umno supreme council announced that it was postponing party polls, there had been swirling speculation that the administration would surprise everyone and call for early elections, possibly in the next few months.

Political pundits and Opposition politicians believed that Abdullah was keen to seek a fresh mandate after a few difficult months, marked by criticisms by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad on his style of governing the country. So, it was inevitable that he was asked the million-ringgit question: Was he calling for early elections?

His reply: "Why should I... You give me the reason why I should do so. Why should I seek a bigger mandate? The mandate that I have is a very safe mandate and I still have a lot of time to deliver what I promised to the people."

The last general election was held on March 21, 2004, and the next one has to be by 2009.

The supreme council said it postponed party polls because it wanted the focus to be on implementing the Ninth Malaysia Plan and avoid the fallout from party elections.

The Opposition is keen on the prospects of an early election because it believes conditions on the ground will help it recover seats lost during the 2004 election.

But the consensus among Umno politicians is that any election date would depend solely on one factor: the economy.

With projects under the 9MP only being dished out now, any talk of going to the ballot box would be premature.

On Lee Kuan Yew's letter

ABDULLAH said he would not be issuing any more statements on the Lee Kuan Yew episode.

He said he had made it clear what he thought of Lee's comments that Chinese here were being marginalised systematically, and the Singapore leader's subsequent letter to him.

"I am not making any more statements.

"As far as I'm concerned, I've already said what I wanted to say. One statement is enough," said

the Prime Minister.

In a letter to Abdullah, Lee said that he was sorry for the "great deal of discomfort" caused by his statement that the Chinese in Malaysia were being systematically marginalised.

He said when he made those comments at a forum on the sidelines of the International Monetary Fund/World Bank meeting last month, he had no intention of meddling in Malaysian politics.

The PM's reply on Tuesday was terse.

"I received the letter and I understand the contents of the letter... I have taken note of it."

Abdullah said that relations with Singapore had not been affected by the furore.

"Besides the recent problem, it's still the same.

"There haven't been any other repercussions or problems," he said.

Lee also told a forum in the city-state that it was vital that Singapore, which is predominantly ethnic Chinese, stand up to its majority Muslim neighbours, Malaysia and Indonesia.

Abdullah has repeatedly said that the remarks by Singapore's founding father were "uncalled for and not appreciated" and risked inflaming racial tensions in the multicultural country.