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Fresh mandate will be timely, says Abdullah

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KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said a fresh mandate would arm the Barisan Nasional government to meet the challenges of the near future.

The prime minister told CNN that an early general election was being considered due to several factors.

"There are a lot of issues in the future and having a (new) mandate will be good," he said in a live interview from Davos, Switzerland yesterday.

"We will call for the election when I think everything is all right and at the moment I think people are ready for the election."

Abdullah said he was not mulling a snap poll more than a year before the current parliamentary term expires in order to pre-empt former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim from contesting the elections.

"There are other factors in my mind that I have to think about before I recommend the dissolution of parliament and fix the date for the elections," he said.

Asked on the Hindraf street protests, the prime minister said the government was talking to non-governmental organisations representing the Indian community and meeting Hindu priests on the status and welfare of temples.

He said the issues concerning the country's Indian minority had been attended to for a long time.

"We know that we have done fairly well but still there is a small percentage of people who are poor."

Abdullah said 1.2 per cent of the population was still categorised as hard-core poor and the poverty level stood at 5.7 per cent.

"We got this figure after reducing poverty from 60 per cent when we became independent. It's a success. But if you want to pick up on poor people, it is because we have yet to complete our agenda on the eradication of poverty," he said.

Abdullah, who chairs the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, was also asked whether the voices of moderate Islam were being drowned by the rise of Islamic extremism and anti-Western sentiment.

He said the root causes of violence and terrorism had to be addressed first.

"But this is a subject not many people want to discuss. They don't want to know the root causes and just want to see what is happening and take action.

"Mostly, the actions are very strong in terms of military responses," he said.

He added that poverty, illiteracy and backwardness among some Muslim groups must be tackled.