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Abdullah: Reforms not to win back public support

KUALA LUMPUR: The major reforms planned for the Judiciary and the Anti-Corruption Agency are not aimed at winning back support for the Barisan Nasional following its poor performance in the recent general election.

In dismissing such perceptions, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said if he had announced it before the election, his critics would say that he was doing it to win votes, and if he did not do it after, they would say that he had for-

gotten his promises.

"I do not forget my promises. I will attend to them when the time comes," he told reporters yesterday after delivering a keynote address at the *Asean Integrity Dialogue 2008*.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister announced massive reforms to the Anti-Corruption Agency, to give it independence and more bite. Just days earlier, he had announced reforms to the Judiciary, to make it more transparent.

Abdullah stressed that the

reforms were all part of his 2004 election manifesto, saying he had not been able to carry them out over the last four years because there were other more pressing matters.

"The manifesto for 2004 is not just for four to five years," he said.

Abdullah also said reforms could not be made quickly without thinking through what needed to be done.

"We just can't undertake reform for the sake of reform. There must be a certain objective ... or it will not

mean anything," he added.

Barisan Nasional lost in five states in the March 8 general election, and angered by this, some Umno members had started pointing fingers at the Prime Minister over the coalition's dismal performance.

In his speech, Abdullah said over the last four years, his government had taken vigorous steps to fight corruption. The number of arrests had risen by 54% compared with seven years ago.

The conviction rate, he added, had

improved to 78% today, a rise of 28% in just five years.

However, he acknowledged that despite the Government's best efforts, it seemed to have fallen short of public expectations, with the people wanting more rapid and decisive action.

He said public perception too was that anti-corruption enforcement was slow and inconsistent, with some saying that "so-called big fish were protected while the small fry faced the full brunt of the law".