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Pak Lah: Bersih is rude

It has gone overboard by tearing up picture, says PM

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KUALA LUMPUR: An irked Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi described as "rude" and "overboard" the behaviour of Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (Bersih) members in their most recent protest.

The Prime Minister's annoyance was sparked by the act of the group members tearing up the Election Commission (EC) chairman's picture as a sign of protest against the electoral system on Friday.

"Whatever that may be, that is *perangai biadab* (rude behaviour).

"That is definitely going overboard," Abdullah said.

On Friday, Bersih steering committee members, who included Opposition leaders, tore up Tan Sri Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahman's pictures and criticised the EC's move to use indelible ink and transparent ballot boxes, and clean up the electoral roll as "cosmetic changes".

Speaking to reporters after launching the Universiti Malaya (UM) Alumni Day yesterday,

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DATUK SERI ABDULLAH
AHMAD BADAWI

Abdullah said Abdul Rashid was an experienced commission officer who had overseen the country's election process for so long and he had always ensured a democratic, clean and fair election process.

He said the EC had done its best to meet the Opposition's demands, which included introducing the use of indelible ink and transparent ballot boxes, as well as cleaning up the electoral roll to ensure the election was clean and fair.

"If all this while what the commission has been doing is not good, these matters would surely have been brought to court because the Opposition would make sure of it," he said, adding that the Opposition had on several occasions protested against mistakes in the electoral roll and voter registers.

"There were some mistakes that were put right but to tear up his photograph is disrespectful," Abdullah said.

He said legal action would be taken against the Bersih members if they had broken any laws.

On reports that supporters of the Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) were calling for their five leaders detained under the Internal Security Act to be fielded in the next general election, Abdullah said anyone who was qualified could contest.

"But there are rules to comply with and no one can contest under the banner of associations that are not registered or not recognised," he said.

Hindraf is not a recognised body. On his call for UM to strengthen its global ranking and strive for greater heights in line with the *Cemerlang, Gemilang, Terbilang* (Excellence, Glory and Distinction) philosophy, he said the university could take several measures to improve itself.

These included enhancing research and development activities, conducting twinning programmes with other universities and opening its door to graduates of other universities to pursue their post-graduate studies.

Abdullah, a UM alumnus, said there was no timeframe for the university to improve on its ranking.

UM, regarded as Malaysia's premier university, dropped from 192nd to 246th place in the Times Higher Education Supplement (THES)-Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings 2007.