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Abdullah: We do not fear Anwar

'Govt won't stop him from contesting, but due process of law cannot be ignored'

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PUTRAJAYA: The Government will not stop Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim from contesting in the Permatang Pauh parliamentary seat and is not afraid to take him on.

However, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the due process of law on the sodomy case involving Anwar would continue to proceed.

"If he (Anwar) is qualified to contest, he will contest, no matter what. There's no problem. We will not stop him.

"Both the sodomy case and the by-election have their own due processes. It will be for the police and the Attorney-General's Chambers to decide if there is a case," he told reporters after meeting with Brunei Crown Prince Pengiran Muda Al-Muhtadee Billah Bolkiah at his office here yesterday.

Abdullah added that the due process of the law would not be halted merely because the person involved wanted to contest or was appointed to a post.

When asked if arresting Anwar after he had announced his intention to contest in Permatang Pauh would affect Malaysia's image overseas, Abdullah said people should not "mix the two up", and that Anwar should not take the opportunity of an impending by-election to "stop" any police action against him.

Malaysians, added Abdullah, must remember that Mohd Saiful Bukhari Azlan, 23, had lodged a police report against Anwar, adding that the complainant should not be ignored.

PKR president and former Opposition leader Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail had on Thursday decided to vacate the Permatang Pauh seat to make way for her husband to contest for the seat.

Abdullah said the decision looked as if Anwar was in a hurry to find a seat to contest, as he had been previously linked to other parliamentary seats such as Bandar Tun Razak and Kulim-Bandar Baru.

The Prime Minister also said despite Anwar contesting in the relatively "safe seat" of Permatang Pauh, which had been his constituency before the 1999 general election, the Government was not afraid to take him on.

"We will not allow him to win without a contest. We will have our own candidate from Barisan Nasional to take him on in the by-election.

"The rakyat there chose Wan Azizah in the last general election in the hope that she would continue to give them her service, and not just leave them like that by resigning from her post and handing over her duties to another.

"The constituents may like Wan Azizah more than Anwar. The voters there must choose carefully who they want for MP," he added, describing Wan Azizah's decision as very "irresponsible".

On Ezam Mohd Nor's offer to contest against his former boss, Abdullah said the ultimate

decision was with the party.

In **KUALA LUMPUR**, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said Barisan would have to be realistic in the coming Permatang Pauh by-election as it would be a tough fight.

Saying that there was no way Barisan could predict the outcome, Najib added that Anwar had obviously made a well-calculated move to stand in his previous constituency.

"However, this move by Anwar is his way of bringing his own problems to the people. The allegation against him was made by a member of his own staff, not the Government."

Earlier, Najib presented scholarships from Amanah Raya to 20 students who would further their religious studies at Al-Azhar University in Egypt.

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More reactions and reports on the impending Permatang Pauh by-election