

Changes will take time: Mahathir

By HARDEV KAUR and AHMAD A. TALIB **Star** 24 APR 1982

THE new government will first examine its machinery to see how existing weaknesses or inadequacies can be remedied by introducing new approaches that will help it fulfill its promise of a clean, efficient and trustworthy government.

Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad said that his promise of a "clean, efficient and trustworthy" administration could not be implemented overnight. It would take time as the change would have to be spread over all strata of society.

The Prime Minister told a Press conference in Rumah Malaysia after keeping a night-long vigil for the election results throughout Thursday night, that the slogan was "not a gimmick. It would guide the government to be formed over its entire term," he added.

He noted that there was need for slightly different approaches to development than the ones adopted hitherto. The government would be more specific in its objectives, and approaches would be developed to achieve these goals spelled out in the Barisan manifesto.

He said that the bigger majority gained by Barisan would enable the government to carry out its programme without any fear of it being weakened in the process.

While he would like to get started on the promises made as soon as possible, Dr Mahathir, however, said he had to wait

for the rest of the election results from Sabah and Sarawak.

Spelling out the reasons behind the Barisan's overwhelming victory, Dr Mahathir said: "The reasons we were voted in were due not only to the promise of development, but also because the opposition had no significant issues which they could capitalise on."

"The opposition, therefore, could not fall back on old issues. Even if they did, it was now evident that they were no longer agitating the rakyat," he added.

The Barisan chairman remarked that he did not expect such good results. He at first did not expect the coalition to perform better than in the 1978 elections, partly due to

the fact that quite a few of its nominees were new.

"They were not familiar with the use of party machinery, and there were problems with the component parties within the Barisan, as well as within individual parties themselves."

He could not say for certain whether the new voters had supported the Barisan fully, but he was sure that the old system of using tricks and gimmicks in attracting votes was not successful in drawing votes away from the BN.

Dr Mahathir said: "We are dealing with a new generation of voters, and we must respect their in-

telligence. If parties were to insult the intelligence of the voters, they would be successful."

He was also happy that the coalition had successfully toppled the chauvinists among the opposition whom he described as being narrowminded. "The country can ill afford them," he stressed.

Commenting on Pas' performance in Kelantan, the Prime Minister said the party had actually made no gains since the 1969 election, when the situation was comparable with the present. Comparison should not be made with 1978 because the situation was then different following the separate poll for the State Assembly. In 1974, Pas was a Barisan component.

The Prime Minister renewed his offer to Pas to rejoin the Barisan Nasional, an offer which he made publicly during the campaign period.

Discussing the reasons why non-Malay Barisan candidates performed well especially in constituencies formerly held by the DAP, Dr Mahathir said the Barisan machinery worked very efficiently all through the campaign period.

The campaign was conducted by the Barisan as a whole, and not by individual parties. Even the MCA and the Gerakan cooperated well

together to secure victories.

"There was no division between these components in my constituency. Likewise, there was also cooperation in the Federal Territory."

Referring to the keenly-contested parliamentary seat of Seremban, Dr Mahathir said that the voters had changed their attitudes and appeared to back the Barisan.

They were now aware of the benefits to be derived by supporting the government as their support for three terms to DAP Chairman Dr Chen Man Hin had evidently brought little benefits.

In response to reporters' questions, Dr Mahathir was quite satisfied with the overall performance of the MCA, which had "conquered" some tough opposition seats. Of particular significance are Barisan's victories in Seremban (Negri Sembilan), Petaling (Selangor), Damansara (Federal Territory) and Kluang in Johore.

Referring to Encik Anwar Ibrahim's victory in the parliamentary seat of Permatang Pauh in Penang, the Prime Minister said it was obvious that Encik Anwar had chosen the right party and that he had chosen the right candidate for Permatang Pauh, a seat formerly held by Pas.

He quipped: "The little

chicken who has just grown his feathers apparently has very strong feathers now."

He said it was too early to discuss the formation of a new cabinet. While he did not expect any radical changes, there would definitely be some changes in the lineup since a number of ministers did not contest this time.

Asked whether the academically qualified would be preferred for cabinet posts, the Prime Minister said a number of factors needed to be taken into account and these include their ability to mix, ability to get along well with their colleagues and appreciate matters in a mature manner.

Under some circumstances, the academically-unqualified might take precedence over the academically qualified.

Meanwhile, Datuk Musa Hitam, who was also present at the Press conference, said he was satisfied with the Barisan's victories and attributed this to the campaign strategy which stressed on the dissemination of information as the most important task.

The rakyat was more interested in practical development that they could see for themselves, and they were aware that they could not get it from the opposition.