

What the foreign Press say

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — The New York Times news service, reporting on the Malaysian general election, says that the results were "a clear disappointment to the Opposition, which wanted to prevent (Datuk Seri) Dr Mahathir Mohamad from winning a two-thirds majority, as all previous Prime Ministers have.

"The opposition leader, (Tengku) Razaleigh Hamzah, wanted to undermine Dr Mahathir's credibility among the majority Malays, who make up about 53 per cent of the electorate. Ethnic Chinese make up about 30 per cent of the population, and Indians and others make up the rest.

"For the first time since independence from Great Britain in 1957, the Opposition was led by a Malay who was a plausible Prime Minister, and Razaleigh, 53, had high hopes of denying Dr Mahathir the two-thirds majority that gives him the mantle of authority here.

"But outside Razaleigh's home State of Kelantan, where his Islamic allies took control of the State Assembly, the Spirit of 46 did not do as well as he had hoped among the Malays.

"Dr Mahathir was also greatly helped by the strong performance of the Malaysian economy, for which he takes full credit.

"It is growing at about 7 per cent a year after inflation is taken into account. As an oil producer, Malaysia is likely to have the highest rate of growth in Southeast Asia next year."

The Reuters news service quotes analysts as saying that the Opposition's failure to make significant gains showed that Razaleigh had far less support among politically dominant Malays than he thought.

"Semangat's goals, including denying Dr Mahathir the two-thirds majority, have failed," political scientist Murugesu Pathmanathan was quoted as saying.

"It speaks well of the faith the people have in the ruling coalition."