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BN win in Bukit Begunan `the people's verdict'

KUANTAN, Mon. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today described the Barisan Nasional's victory in yesterday's Bukit Begunan by-election as "the people's verdict against the Election Court judgment".

Dr Mahathir expressed fears that the decision by the Election Court to nullify the BN's victory in Bukit Begunan in the 1996 State Election could lead to further abuse.

In yesterday's by-election, Barisan's Mong Dagang defeated independent Jack Bujang with a majority of 4,615 votes.

The by-election was called after the Election Court's declaration on Feb 13 that Mong's victory in last year's State Election in Bukit Begunan was null and void on grounds of bribery and corrupt practices.

Speaking to reporters after the simultaneous launching of Malaysia Electric Corporation Bhd and the RM4-billion MEC City project in Gambang, 25km from here, Dr Mahathir said:

"I fear because the court made it clear that Mong and his agents are not involved in corruption but there were incidences where money changed hands.

"But if I stand in an election and my election is declared illegal simply because someone else offered bribes to others, it will be unfair."

Asked whether the election laws which state that decisions by the Election Court could not be challenged was unfair, Dr Mahathir said:

"I do not know. We have appointed judges and we expect them to understand.

"What can we do if the judge has the final say and if he makes decisions without accurate basis?

"He (the judge) himself said the candidate and his agents were not involved. But there was evidence that money changed hands; we do not know whether from Barisan Nasional or the Opposition.

"So simply because someone paid someone else, the candidate lost out.

"So, next time, when there is an election and if we do not like a particular candidate and we know that he is going to win, we can start passing around money and take pictures.

"And then use that (the pictures) as evidence of corruption. If this happens, we will be in a difficult position."

Asked what the Government would do to ensure that candidates were not victimised by such court decisions, Dr Mahathir said:

"I do not know what we can do. The candidate has to contest again and this time, he has won with a big majority. Four-fifth of the votes went to him.

"So, that is the verdict of the people, not only against the (Opposition) candidate but also against the judgment."

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