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People of Kelantan prefer Pas to progress, says PM

PRIME Minister and Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Barisan Nasional's defeat in the Pulai Chondong by-election showed that the people of Kelantan wanted Pas more than development and better administration.

"It was the choice of the Kelantan people ... there is no excuse. If Kelantan wants to be remote and shy away (from the rest of the country), what can we do?"

Dr Mahathir, who is also BN chairman, said he did not want to look for excuses for BN's loss in the by-election when the fact is that in Kelantan the people like Pas.

"They do not care if there is development, or if the administration runs well. These are not important to them. The most important thing is that Pas wins," he said.

Dr Mahathir said if Umno is strong in the state the party will win. Parti Melayu Semangat 46, formerly a Pas ally and now back in the Umno fold, is no longer a threat to Umno and BN in the state, "but even without Semangat 46 we lost too".

Pas won the Pulai Chondong state seat with a slim majority of 118 votes when its candidate, Zulkifli Mamat, polled 4,778 votes against BN's Yusoff Hamzah who obtained 4,660 votes.

The turnout was 75.4 per cent. The constituency has 12,635 voters.

Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said despite the defeat, BN performed remarkably in Monday's by-election. "We only lost by a slim margin," he told reporters after officiating at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka's 1997 annual gathering in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Anwar dismissed a suggestion that BN had lost to Pas because of poor support from its members, particularly from Umno as well as top leaders including those in other states.

"They were there (in Pulai Chondong). There were many state representatives there, including ministers. But many others could not be there as they were on leave," he added.

Umno secretary-general Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik yesterday said BN will try to find out its mistakes at Pulai Chondong and not look for scapegoats.

"It is not a good thing to point fingers at another person every time one loses. We must not look for mistakes ... that is a bad attitude. Instead, we should now try to find out why we lost and conduct an analysis of the situation."

Sabbaruddin said he believes that given time, the Kelantan people will accept BN. He told reporters after opening the Asean Tourism Conference 1997 in Kuala Lumpur yesterday the coalition will always try to improve itself.

Entrepreneur Development Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed thanked BN supporters at Pulai Chondong because the coalition obtained a larger number of votes although it lost in the by-election.

"We worked very hard, really hard ... our machinery performed well with the support of various parties, whether they are from Umno, former S46 members and those from outside Pulai Chondong," he told reporters after meeting participants of a marketing programme in Kuala Lumpur.

"The people have made their choice ... we congratulate the successful candidate because our country is democratic and democracy is thriving," he said.

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