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Najib-Mahathir

MAHATHIR'S STATEMENT A CHALLENGE TO US, SAYS NAJIB

JOHOR BAHRU, Oct 17 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement yesterday that the Barisan Nasional (BN) will still form the next government but with a reduced majority must be viewed as a challenge.

Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said Dr Mahathir's statement did not mean Umno or the BN had conceded defeat and would not work hard to face the next general election.

"I feel Dr Mahathir wants to throw a challenge at us. His statement must be viewed positively to step up efforts to build confidence among the people to continue to give us the mandate," he told reporters, here.

Najib, who is Education Minister, was commenting Dr Mahathir's statement in Tokyo yesterday that the ruling BN might not have such a big majority in future but the same party would be governing the country.

Dr Mahathir made the statement in a dialogue with Japanese corporate leaders, bankers, academicians and journalists.

He said the BN would win in the next general election but it must be prepared to face bigger challenges than the previous election in 1995.

"We admit the country's economic and political situations are not as stable as in the last election," he said.

In the last election, there were no economic and political problems like now, he said.

However, Najib was confident that the people would make the right decision and would not be swayed by issues involving a certain individual.

"They will give importance to the country's future," he said.

He said the people have the wisdom and would think rationally and not emotionally to vote in a government which would fulfil their expectations and aspirations.

More importantly, they would opt for a government that could guarantee continued prosperity, unity and stability, he added.

Meanwhile in KANGAR, Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim said the statement by Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno President, was an important message to BN leaders and members to strive to repeat the resounding victory achieved by the coalition in past general elections.

He said the BN had a proven track record on its ability to develop the country and protect the people's interests.

"As such, there is no reason for the people to reject the present government," he said.

He also expressed disappointment against political renegades who badmouth the country from abroad.

-- BERNAMA

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