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BN ACCEPTS DEFEAT IN KELANTAN AND TERENGGANU

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 30 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad accepts the Barisan Nasional's defeat in Kelantan and Terengganu but said it was caused by the scare tactics used by PAS on Muslims.

The Prime Minister said PAS could also have been aided by people working with government agencies.

He said: "We have unfortunately lost two states...but we accept that because this is a democratic country and in an election it is always possible to lose as much as we can win."

"So we accept that we have lost the state of Kelantan and Terengganu," he said to shouts of "this is a free election" from party workers and supporters at a packed press conference at the UMNO building here attended by both the local and international media.

He said the loss of the two east coast states did not mean that the BN had fallen in the "Malay heartland" because there were other Malay states in which the BN won big.

"We lost in Terengganu because of PAS' tactic to frighten the people and its guarantee that people who vote PAS can go to heaven..and there were also people who worked with government agencies," he said.

Dr Mahathir said BN wished to find out why requests for recounts in certain areas were rejected by the officers concerned.

He said "we noticed some misprint on the postal votes" where a cross made against BN was not valid but a cross for PAS was valid.

"We are looking into this. We will study the matter and make a complaint if there is a basis," he said.

"There may be other reasons for our defeat in Kelantan and Terengganu, and we will conduct a post-mortem," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the BN would recapture the two states in the next election.

To a question on reconciliation among those involved in the election, Dr Mahathir said although the polls were about electing a government it was not meant for quarelling with people.

He said: "We can do work with the opposition parties outside of politics because politically we will disagree with them but there are other areas that we can agree with them."

"We are particularly concerned that the opposition parties, particularly PAS, will want to carry on this enmity towards us until the next elections," he said.

He said this was because they knew that if they got close to BN they would lose their supporters.

Asked on the question of federal aid for the two states, he said "we will see how much aid we can give".

Commenting on BN's seat losses in Kedah, he said: "Well, we lose some, we win some."

Dr Mahathir said Kedah Menteri Besar Tan Sri Sanusi Junid himself had told him that "the defeat is marginal but he said that is no excuse."

Asked about the major casualties in BN, he said: "Well, it also happened to the opposition because it lost (Lim) Kit Siang and Karpal (Singh), but we did not lose our top guns...I won."

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said winning and losing were part of electoral contests, and BN's losses showed that the elections in Malaysia were democratic, free and fair.

"It is the people's decision and we respect it," he said when asked about BN's defeat in Kelantan and Terengganu.

"Keadilan did not make an impact...actually PAS is the one which made an impact," he said.

Abdullah said the silent majority had made their voices heard this time and contributed to the BN victory.

He said it could not be determined yet whether the reduced majorities obtained by BN in several seats were caused by protest votes.

-- BERNAMA

GM YBY