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Mahathir-Candidates

BN FIELDING CANDIDATES CAPABLE OF GAINING PEOPLE'S SUPPORT

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 16 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Menteri Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight Barisan Nasional (BN) will field candidates who know how to get the people's support and are capable in other spheres including administration.

He said BN would choose candidates who could win, meaning that candidates with "brilliant brains" but who did not know how to garner the people's support would not be productive to the coalition.

"If we only base on popularity and he does not have administrative skills, he's also not suitable as a candidate.

"We must find candidates who are popular as well as capable," he said in a special interview with TV3, here.

The transcript of the interview was released to Bernama by the Prime Minister's Office.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president and BN chairman, was asked the criteria for choosing candidates for the general election on Nov 29. Nomination is on Saturday.

He, however, did not discount the possibility of having candidates who are popular but lack ability in other fields or who are unpopular but capable.

"We will help them to win," he said.

Dr Mahathir expressed confidence that BN would retain its two-thirds majority in this election.

"I think we can. Actually in 1995 we achieved extraordinary victory in that we got nearly four-fifths of the seats. So, two-thirds is not difficult for us to achieve," he said.

He said this confidence was based on a survey of the constituencies to be contested by BN which had been divided into black areas that cannot be won, white areas that are definite winners and grey areas with 50-50 chance.

"We clearly see that our white constituencies are more than half and the grey constituencies are not that grey. This gives us confidence that we will get more than 128 seats," he said.

A total of 193 parliamentary and 394 state (except for Sabah and Sarawak) seats are up for grabs in the 10th general election.

Dr Mahathir said the two-thirds victory was important to set up a strong government that could discharge its duties and formulate good policies and approaches for the country.

"That's why more than two thirds is important and it is not to amend the constitution," he said.

The prime minister said many other developing countries were not led by a strong government because they had only a simple majority.

This meant that the government would topple even if only one person crossed over to the opposition, he said.

"Because of this, the government does not want to take important but unpopular actions. On the other hand, if we have a big two-thirds majority, we are not afraid of our members crossing over," he said.

The big majority also gave the government more courage to take measures that might not appear to be good but later turned out to be productive and good for the country with time, he said.

Asked whether there would be any surprises in the BN manifesto to be launched in a few days, Dr Mahathir said he did not know whether it would

be surprising or not.

The BN manifesto would focus on ensuring that the country continued to be independent, developed and united, he said, adding that it would also outline the measures that needed to be taken to achieve a particular objective.

"If we say that we want to continue to be independent, we must do the needful. Of course we have to ensure that our country continues to prosper, have strong financial status and knows how to manage the economy so that there will be no effective (external) pressure," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that in terms of unity, BN needed to know the aspirations of the multiracial people in the country and how to entertain each community without causing unhappiness among the other communities.

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