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Election

BN GETS TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 30 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad led the Barisan Nasional to another landslide victory in the general election with a two-thirds thrown in, despite losing control of Terengganu to Parti Islam SeMalaysia (Pas).

Pas, which contested the general election by partnering three other opposition parties to take on the BN one-on-one in most of the 193 parliamentary and 393 state seats at stake, appeared to be the biggest winners among the opposition front, Barisan Alternatif.

The party made inroads into the strongholds of Umno, the dominant party in the BN led by Dr Mahathir, who was re-elected in the Kubang Pasu constituency in his home state of Kedah.

Pas also retained Kelantan where returns yet to be confirmed showed the party virtually made a clean sweep of the 14 parliamentary seats in the state which it has ruled since 1990 and over two-thirds of the state Legislative Assembly seats.

Dr Mahathir, addressing BN party leaders, supporters and the media at the BN headquarters here at 3.07 am, announced that officially the ruling coalition had won 131 seats and unofficially 149.

When parliament was dissolved on Nov 11 to pave the way for the snap polls, the 14-party BN held 166 seats.

To cheers from delirious supporters, Dr Mahathir also announced that the BN won all the state governments with a two-thirds majority, except in Kelantan and Terengganu.

" We will form the central government as soon as we get the official results," he said to even more thunderous applause from the supporters who had been waiting for hours for the returns to trickle in via television screens.

Dr Mahathir, who led the BN into his fifth general election in the 18 years he has been prime minister, campaigned tirelessly during the election with a strong message to voters to give the BN a two-thirds majority.

A two-thirds majority is necessary to amend the Federal constitution but Dr Mahathir had said many times it was more needed to provide a strong government to take Malaysia into the new millennium.

Asked on the loss of the oil-rich state of Terengganu, he said: " We win some, we lose some".

But he said the opposition also lost some of their big names like DAP Secretary-General Lim Kit Siang and Vice Chairman Karpal Singh.

This was Lim's first ever defeat in a parliamentary contest in his eight general elections since 1969.

" So clearly BN is still the party of choice of the people of Malaysia," he said.

Conceding defeat in Terengganu, held by the BN since 1961, and the BN's failure to wrest Kelantan from Pas, he said: " We have unfortunately lost two states to the opposition. We will win it back the next time".

Dr Mahathir had called the snap election, not due till June next year, apparently to take advantage of a robust economic recovery from the most severe recession in over three decades.

Malaysia's gross domestic product (GDP) was expected at 8.1 per cent for the third quarter of this year from 4.1 per cent in the second quarter, a big turnaround from negative growth a year ago.

But Pas together with the DAP, Parti Keadilan Nasional and Parti Rakyat

Malaysia ganged up under Barisan Alternatif in the most solid electoral pact ever to take on the BN, in power throughout the 42 years of the country's independence.

The opposition front campaigned vigourously, even well before the dissolution of parliament on Nov 11, vowing to form a more democratic government, and promising to abolish "draconian" laws like the Internal Security Act, riding on the political events in the country following last year's sacking of deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Anwar's wife Datin Dr Seri Wan Azizah Ismail took up the cudgel and together with several of the ex-deputy prime minister's staunch allies, formed Parti Keadilan Nasional.

Dr Wan Azizah until recently a low-profile housewife, became Keadilan president and has now officially stamped her mark as a politician by being elected to parliament in the election.

She easily won the Permatang Pauh parliamentary seat, which Anwar won in the past four general elections.

Anwar was touted by the Barisan Alternatif as its candidate for prime minister if it comes to power, but did not contest the election as he is serving a six-year jail sentence for abuse of power.

Dr Wan Azizah in her first comments following her victory, vowed to address several issues.

In a phone-in interview with CNN, she said among the issues were corruption, abuse of power and the "fuzziness: between the legislative and the executive in the Malaysian system.

Wan Azizah said her victory meant that "the majority of voters have clearly given me a mandate."

The BN made a clean sweep of the 28 parliamentary seats in Sarawak and 17 of the 20 seats in Sabah, among the earlier of the results to be known.

Signs of a big split in the Malay votes also appeared in Pahang where Education Minister and Umno vice president Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, had a scare when he was re-elected with only a 241-vote majority over his Pas rival in the Pekan constituency.

In the 1995 election, he won a thumping 10,793-vote majority. SC104

Pas also made unexpectedly strong gains in Kedah, another Malay belt state which it went all-out to capture. From nothing in the last parliament, it secured eight seats, in fact one more than BN.

Pas president Datuk Fadzil Noor, who has never made it to parliament in his long political career, this time succeeded. He also won a state seat, both in Kedah.

Most astonishing was the way Pas swept to power in Terengganu, which carries with it the coveted annual oil royalty of at least RM400 million from Petronas for the new Pas state government to spend.

Conceding defeat, a shocked Menteri Besar Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad, who has run the state for over 25 years, said: " I accept defeat because it is the will of the people".

" We do not know why we lost but I accept defeat with absolute patience because everything is in the people's hands".

He said the BN would carry out a post-mortem on the defeat and hoped that the new state government would carry out its promises made to the people during the election campaign.

He appealed to BN candidates who lost in the election not to despair adding that there could be a blessing in disguise in the defeat.

-- BERNAMA

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