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Mahathir-BN

BN NOT ACCEPTING PARTY-HOPPING ASSEMBLYMEN, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, March 14 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the Barisan Nasional, which won the Sabah state election with a clear majority, will not accept newly-elected assemblymen from other parties wanting to join the coalition.

"No way. We used to accept them before but not this time," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who is BN chairman, said this at a press conference at his official residence Sri Perdana here.

He was asked whether the BN would accept newly-elected assemblymen from rival parties wishing to hop on to the victorious coalition.

The BN won 31 of the 48 Sabah state legislative assembly seats, leaving Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) to trail a long way behind with 17 seats after all results were declared just after midnight.

Dr Mahathir said that in the 1994 state polls, PBS assemblymen who hopped on the BN were those who realised then that a PBS government would not be effective.

"That was why they left the PBS.

"They had reckoned that even if the PBS formed the government and they were still with it, the PBS would not be effective. For that reason they joined the BN bandwagon," said Dr Mahathir.

The prime minister said the situation in this state election was different in that the PBS had lost and hence there was no need for PBS assemblymen to hop on to the BN.

Asked if the outcome of the election was a test of his popularity as suggested by certain quarters, Dr Mahathir said: "To a certain extent, yes."

"There is of course that implication. But of course, other places may emphasise other issues," he said.

Citing the economy as one of them, Dr Mahathir said he was inclined to believe that most of the people feeling the pinch of the economic downturn, like traders, were apparently happy with the government's economic recovery measures.

"They have not rejected the measures taken by the government," Dr Mahathir said.

Asked whether the Sabah election results were an endorsement of his leadership, Dr Mahathir said the answer to the question lay with the assessment of the outcome by others, and not by him.

"Nonetheless the results show that Umno is still acceptable because it won all the seats it contested and that the BN still has strong credibility," said Dr Mahathir who is also Umno president.

Dr Mahathir said only deep-seated racial sentiment could dislodge the BN.

"The other issues have ineffectively influenced the results," he said.

The BN suffered its biggest upset when Sabah Chief Minister and state BN chairman Tan Sri Bernard Dompok lost the Moyog seat to Datuk Clarence Bongkos Malakun of the PBS.

The prime minister was asked whether Dompok would be made one of the six appointed state assemblymen as provided for by the State constitution and be allowed to continue his term as chief minister.

"He has said he wants to retire from politics so all the statements must be taken into consideration," Dr Mahathir said.

Before the press conference Dr Mahathir received a call from Dompok and

the prime minister expressed sadness over the Parti Demokratik Sabah (PDS) president's defeat.

Dompok polled 6,482 against Malakun's 10,870 votes in a six-cornered fight.

Asked whether the PDS, which had taken a severe beating in the election, still has a role to play in Sabah politics, Dr Mahathir said the party still has a role to play.

"The two seats it won were quite an achievement considering the way PBS had played up racial sentiments," Dr Mahathir said.

He said the BN would have to study very carefully the election results and take into consideration the support given to Dompok as well as to the other BN candidates.

The prime minister said the 31 seats the BN had won were more than it had expected given the Kadazandusuns' rejection of the BN because of their entrenched racial sentiments.

However, he added, in certain constituencies they did also support the BN.

-- BERNAMA

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