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BN win not deemed newsworthy by foreign media

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THE foreign media is already giving inordinate emphasis to the general election.

Since the Sabah election, regional papers as well as the wires have turned their attention to Barisan Nasional's chances in nationwide elections due before April 2000.

This shift in emphasis is not strange or unusual - the Press would always want to predict the outcome of social and political events and developments - but the manner in which attention was shifted begs comment.

Just weeks and days before the elections in Sabah, the foreign press had descended full force certain that the BN was headed for defeat.

They were there to witness the beginning of the end of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's 17 year-leadership.

Failure in Sabah would seal the fate of the BN in the general election, they said.

One of the main reasons for the defeat, they said, would be the former deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim issue, reformasi and the restlessness and dissatisfaction it has caused.

Day after day, there were reports alluding to this and other reasons which would deprive the coalition of victory.

But the BN's win deprived them of the drama they were expecting.

As if in retaliation, they gave scant acknowledgment of the victory.

In Monday's issue of the Asian Wall Street Journal, a story on Mohamed Ezam Mohd Noor, Anwar's former political secretary returning from self-imposed exile made the front page.

The Sabah election report was relegated to page 10. Why the banishment to a back page after weeks of prominence?

Could the reason be hidden in the fact that the reporter had misread or misjudged the developments there?

Intriguingly, the article states that the "Anwar affair never surfaced as an election issue in this rural and fiercely parochial State. Indeed, it was more down-to-earth problems such as the need for electricity, water and housing that dominated Sabahans."

Strange that this should be noted only after the elections when such factors were deemed unimportant earlier.

During the campaign period, observers who went on the ground noted the nuances, the differences between what was needed and expected in Sabah as opposed to that in the peninsula, but the foreign media hardly noticed this. They were obsessed with Dr Mahathir and Umno.

What the elections meant for Sabahans was of little concern to the foreign press.

Among the few foreign reporters who moved among the grassroots was the Kuala Lumpur-based staff correspondent of the Singapore Straits Times.

The Reuters camera crew visited the island of Banggi, a six-hour car and boat ride from Kota Kinabalu, almost too briefly to be of any significance.

(The news agency does however point out that it reported the BN's early lead at 9.03pm and not 10.55pm on Saturday, March 13, as stated by this paper).

Still, it seems that a BN victory is not considered as newsworthy as its predicted loss.

Or, having stalked the prey, was the foreign media disappointed that

they were deprived of the kill?

Are they not big enough to admit that they had misjudged the Sabah situation? And to save face, they had to move away?

Is that why they have turned their attention to the general election in the hope that this is where the giant will fall?

Couldn't the foreign media have at least acknowledged the fact that the people of Sabah had made their choice - rightly or wrongly.

Even a grudging admission of this would have lent more credibility to their image as impartial and objective reporters.

Instead, they have set up tent, this time in the peninsula, to start their predictions and prognoses all over again.

And when they are done with us, they will move on to more salacious and sensational hunting ground.

But then, isn't this part of the game?

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