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Sabah-BN (Victory)

DEVELOPMENT TRIUMPHS OVER SENTIMENT

KOTA KINABALU, March 13 (Bernama) -- The Sabah state election has ended with a victory for development over sentiment.

"Development vs Sentiment" is basically what the battlelines of the Barisan Nasional (BN) which was returned to power at the polls, and other contesting parties are all about.

The BN went to the polls promising more development on all fronts for Sabah, picking up from where it started in 1994, while rival parties, especially Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) and Bersekutu, campaigned on issues bordering on sentiment.

In the run up to the polls, PBS and Bersekutu, led by former chief ministers Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan and Datuk Harris Salleh, hit the campaign trail by touching mainly on state rights and the need to respect the State Constitution, citing the rotation of the chief ministership as an issue.

The BN, PBS and Bersekutu each fielded candidates in all the 48 constituencies.

Pairin also campaigned on issues relating to the rule of law, referring to 1994 episode when PBS' elected assemblymen were "enticed" into defecting to the BN, causing its collapse soon after it had won the state election in 1994 by a razor-thin majority of 25 seats.

He said Sabahans wanted local affairs and issues to be decided by themselves, and did not want to see outside political interference.

Harris, who was attempting a political comeback, projected himself as a more experienced leader and one who could be counted on to restore Sabah's business and economic health at a time when the state is going through economic difficulties.

Being chief minister for nine years till 1985, the results clearly showed the voters thought Harris had had his day. This was reflected by Bersekutu's election manifesto which dealt with recycled past issues like state rights.

Harris and Bersekutu were totally rejected by the voters with Harris himself failing to even put up a strong challenge in the Likas seat against another former chief minister, Datuk Yong Teck Lee of BN, who won easily.

But the BN campaign onslaught emphasised on continued development and funds for the state and its people.

Pushing hard on the need for Sabah, which still has to grapple with the problem of poverty and a lack of industrialisation, to progress further were BN leaders - from the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad down.

They spared no stone unturned. They were persistent. They were everywhere in Sabah and they convinced the electorate that the BN meant business.

Dr Mahathir himself made no less than three trips to the state within a month to drum up support for a BN win.

Backing up strongly and incessantly was his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Badawi and virtually the entire BN election machinery.

--BERNAMA

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