

01/12/1999

Dr Mahathir has done it again for the 5th time

Abdullah Ahmad

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the good doctor, the great and controversial "PM" has done it again - winning his fifth general elections in a row. A rare achievement in any democratic country, old or new.

The doctor defied all predictions and wishes of his detractors and enemies, foreign and local. He made the Opposition, the international media and a certain foreign power eat their humble pie. They had in concert wanted him to lose his two-thirds majority grip of power in Parliament. Better still had he lost. Instead, the Barisan Nasional (BN) won 149 seats in the 193-member Parliament.

Pas, which I had said time and again in previous articles, became the chief beneficiary of the shotgun Opposition marriage - siring 27 offsprings, and all males!

As expected Pas not only easily retains Kelantan but to the surprise of many it nearly wiped out Umno in Kelantan at both State and Federal levels. To cap it all, Pas also captured Terengganu. Pas won Terengganu in 1959 and lost it to Umno through defections and Pas' internal schism in 1961.

Pas' performance in this two north-eastern states did not come as a shock to those who understand Malay and Islamic politics - that development, while desirable, is not to be bartered with what is seen as Malay-Islamic principles. Rightly or wrongly, unfortunately or otherwise, the Malays in Kelantan and Terengganu are content with the standard of living they now enjoy. They have food on the table, generally their own shelter no matter how humble, acceptable facilities, schools, hospitals and social services. But what is imperative to them is that they are led and governed by what they perceived as an Islamic Government to ensure their "safe passage to heaven".

Dr Mahathir bore himself like a humble monarch, albeit a democratically elected one. He is as good and upright a statesman as ever a politician is, and he was very elated though he appeared surprised that the BN lost Terengganu. Even I knew Kelantan was a gone case and if the Prime Minister knew which I am sure he did, he disguised it very well.

The Pas tempest returned to Terengganu with an uncanny fury to wreak havoc on the Umno ship of state captained by an old skipper, Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad, a veteran of 25 years.

I stayed late to see the BN voted back into power with a two-thirds majority which I had told everyone it would be, so it was not altogether surprising to me. As I was sharing the joy of Dr Mahathir's triumph, I was also seeing the pre-millennial tempest breaking Wan Mokhtar's ship into pieces.

The DAP, as expected did poorly in all states, especially in Penang. It paid a terrible price for consorting with Pas. It handed over the parliamentary Opposition leadership to Datuk Fadzil Noor, Pas president, on a silver platter. Having said that DAP did quite well in the Federal Territory, it rather surprised me. Many people had thought Keadilan would have won at least a seat in the Federal Territory where the reformasi movement was started but it got none.

I failed in my test about Keadilan. I had thought it would only win in Permatang Pauh but it did manage to gather five, three in Kelantan and one in Terengganu, courtesy of Pas.

Parti Rakyat has never won a parliamentary seat on its own since it was founded 44 years ago, and true to form, it did not yesterday even though every party in the Barisan Alternatif did.

So, the Barisan Alternatif, much touted as a credible alternative to the BN, was after all just a political ennuich. Or just a waffle. To be sure it is an impossible task to topple Dr Mahathir who profited from the disparate and desperate Opposition marriage of convenience, improving economy and combined strong support from pragmatic Chinese voters and enlightened Bumiputeras and other non-Bumiputeras.

What matters despite Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's saga and what appeared to be an increase in popular support for the Opposition, a majority of practical Malaysians kept the BN in power with a two-thirds majority as pleaded by Dr Mahathir.

Dr Mahathir got what he wanted. He will lead us into the new millennium with a strong and fresh commitment: to make sure we as a nation remain free, sovereign and independent, united, prosperous and the people live in peace and harmony.

If the economy continues to perform well as Tun Daim Zainuddin said it would, the people's capabilities enhanced, and the new Government performing better, Umno and component parties in the BN will remain strong.

Now that Dr Mahathir has got his magic two-thirds majority, I expect investors will return in droves because the economic fundamentals are very favourable.

Many foreign friends asked me if as a result of Pas' success whether the BN will become more fundamental in its politics and policies in order to placate and woo back the Malays in Kelantan and Terengganu. My immediate answer was: I believe Dr Mahathir will maintain a happy balanced programme between races and between modernisation and Islamic values. After all he did say he wanted to recapture Kelantan and Terengganu, and if that is the case, he will have to rethink Umno's approach to the new electorate in the new millennium.

The BN won because Dr Mahathir dared to do what he believed in - selective capital controls - despite what the West said about it. The way he thumbed his nose at the IMF won him support from all loyal Malaysians.

The foreign media and its owners wanted Dr Mahathir's ship to be smashed into smithereens. Though it heaved and tossed to their fury it did not capsize.

They wanted the Opposition to give Dr Mahathir "a black eye" but the Malaysian electorate refused to do their bidding.

Someone insisted to me that Dr Mahathir's victory was pyrrhic. Whatever, I told him, Dr Mahathir did win the war.

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