

01/12/1999

Dr M: We will bring the two States back

Farush Khan

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - While accepting the people's democratic right to give Pas the mandate to rule oil-rich Terengganu, in addition to Kelantan, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad expressed Barisan Nasional's determination to recapture the two States in the next general election.

"Yes, we will bring them back," said the BN chairman at a packed Press conference early this morning.

During the half-an-hour Press conference held at the Umno building beginning about 3.15am, Terengganu was the reporters' favourite questions, considering its shocking loss to Pas.

"We lost in Kelantan and Terengganu because Pas has instilled fear among the people and promised paradise to those who vote for Pas."

According to Dr Mahathir, the BN had also found that some of those working with the Government had also supported Pas both in Kelantan and Terengganu.

He said in several constituencies, the BN had discovered that some officers at the counting centres had refused to do a recount and that could be in favour of the Opposition.

"There could also be other reasons for our loss in Kelantan and Terengganu.

"We will carry out a post-mortem," he said.

Pas won 28 of the 32 State seats. State Pas commissioner Abdul Hadi Awang was today named its Menteri Besar, taking over Umno's Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad, who lost his seat in Cukai.

It also won seven of the eight parliamentary seats in the State. The remaining seat in Kemaman was won by the Parti Keadilan Nasional.

Terengganu State Government receives between RM400 million and RM500 million ringgit in annual royalties from Petronas.

In Kelantan Pas won 41 of the 43 State seats with the remaining two, Galas and Paloh, going to the BN. It also won 10 of the 14 parliamentary seats. Three others went to Keadilan and one to the BN.

Among the BN heavyweights defeated in Kelantan were Second Finance Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed and Rural Development Minister Datuk Annuar Musa. Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Ibrahim Ali lost too.

Asked on the possibility of BN's reconciliation with its political opponents, Dr Mahathir said the BN was willing to work with the opposition parties outside of politics.

However, he said, the BN was particularly concerned that the opposition parties, especially Pas, would want to continue as BN's enemy until the next election as they knew they would lose supporters if they got close to BN.

"They will keep their supporters away from us but we will not keep our supporters away from them. They can listen to Pas if they like," he added.

On whether the BN's loss in Kelantan and Terengganu meant that the Barisan Nasional had lost in the Malay heartland, he said the two States were not the whole of the Malay heartland. "Look at Johor," he said.

On whether the victory of the president of Parti Keadilan Nasional Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, who is also wife of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, in the Permatang Pauh parliamentary seat was a result of sympathy votes, Dr Mahathir said: "I think there are a lot of sympathy votes when you and your child cry. It tugs at the heartstrings."

He said while he realised that the people in Permatang Pauh was used to their former MP (Anwar) and therefore was sympathetic to Azizah, he wondered whether Azizah "could contribute anything at all".

Asked on what he thought the issues would be with Pas taking over as leader of the Opposition, Dr Mahathir said Pas would do nothing except to curse the Government.

On whether the full support by the Chinese to the Barisan Nasional indicated their acknowledgement of the Government's contribution to the economy, he said the Chinese appreciated what the Government had done for them in terms of the economy.

(END)