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Mahathir-Candidates

30 PER CENT OF BN CANDIDATES TO BE NEW FACES

PUTRAJAYA, Nov 18 (Bernama) -- At least 30 per cent of the Barisan Nasional (BN) candidates in the Nov 29 general election will be new faces including former Parti Melayu Semangat 46 (S46) members who have rejoined Umno, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said that the main criteria in the selection of candidates were their capability in winning the seats to be contested and their undivided loyalty to the party.

Dr Mahathir, who is BN chairman, told local editors at his office here that every time an election approaches, he would definitely face problem in making a final decision on the list of candidates but this time, the burden was not as heavy as that he had faced in the previous elections.

He said that in the previous elections, he had made the decision alone but this time, for the list of Umno candidates, he was assisted by the party's vice presidents and the secretary-general.

Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, said that the list of the Umno candidates would be announced tomorrow.

He said that among the problems he faced in introducing new faces were that incumbents were not happy at being replaced or dropped and as such he had to disappoint those interested in becoming candidates.

"One way or the other, problems will arise...if not dropped, others will not have the chance to become candidates.

"How are we to increase the number of candidates from among the Umno Youth and Wanita Umno because the candidates from the Youth and Wanita, when they become older, refuse to step down," he said.

Asked whether those who were close to Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim when he was deputy prime minister have a chance to become candidates, the prime minister said that Umno does not discriminate against them just because they had been close to Anwar.

"Having been close or cooperative with Datuk Seri Anwar is not a criterion in the selection of candidates. Previously, even though they were close to Datuk Seri Anwar, they were loyal to the party. If they have been sincere and loyal to the party, they will be selected as candidates," he said.

Replying to another question, Dr Mahathir said that the new faces to be fielded included members of the now defunct S46 who had pledged loyalty to Umno.

The prime minister also expressed confidence that the BN would win in the three states -- Kedah, Terengganu and Perlis -- which PAS stated the opposition party would capture in the general election.

"We are not denying that we are facing problems in the three states. We faced the same problems in the previous elections but the results were different from what had been predicted by analysts," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that he regarded the 1990 general election as more challenging for the BN compared to this election for various reasons.

He said that even though there was a political crisis following the sacking of Anwar and PAS' influence was said to be increasingly stronger, not one Umno leader with calibre from the Supreme Council had left the party as what had happened in the 1990 general election.

"Also, before the 1990 general election, some 85,000 Umno members left the party but it did not happen this time," he said.

The prime minister also said that due to the BN's success in uniting

parties representing various races and interests, the concept had now been adopted by the opposition parties which had formed a coalition as a strategy to win the coming general election.

"This strategy has allowed PAS to cooperate with the DAP even though it was only to please themselves," he said.

Dr Mahathir also expressed confidence that the Election Commission (EC) would conduct this general election as smoothly as they did in the previous elections even though for the first time, polling would be held in one day in Sabah and Sarawak compared to two days previously.

He said that this showed the improvements in communications and facilities enjoyed by the people, especially the road network in the two states.

Replying to another question, he said that in future, the election process would be more sophisticated and efficient with the usage of information technology rapidly developed in the country.

"Maybe, we can vote by just pressing the button, God willing," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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