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Election-Non-Malays

NON-MALAYS EMERGE AS KING MAKERS IN GENERAL ELECTION

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KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 30 (Bernama) -- The outcome of the 1999 general election showed that the Barisan Nasional (BN) which secured a landslide victory gaining new "legitimacy" amongst non-Malays, particularly the Chinese.

This "theory", though yet to be verified until after the respective political parties have carried out their post-mortem on the polls, has been accepted by the ruling BN coalition and the Barisan Alternatif, an opposition pact comprising PAS, DAP, Keadilan and PRM.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said early today that the Chinese voters backed BN candidates because they appreciated the steps taken by the government to overcome the financial and economic crisis.

PRM president Datuk Syed Hussin Ali said while BN has gained new legitimacy amongst non-Malays, it has also lost some grounds among the Malays.

"The fact is that the Barisan Nasional, specifically Umno, has clearly lost legitimacy among a majority of Malays while apparently gaining new legitimacy amongst non-Malays," he said.

Syed Hussin whose party was defeated in yesterday's polls, said despite its losses, PRM was heartened by the new-found cooperation between the various races in the country which previously was limited to elites. .

The BN won 148 of the 193 Parliament seats contested.

BN's Shah Alam's newly-elected MP Datuk Mohamed Zin Mohamad, too, admitted that he won the seat with the help of the non-Malay voters.

He said the Indians and Chinese who voted for BN realised the good that the coalition has done for the country.

Most analysts believed that the non-Malays supported the BN because there was no credible opposition while the DAP lost its support of the Chinese due to its cooperation with PAS.

"The majority of the Chinese as well as the Indians, the loyalist of BN, have voted for the BN and not Umno, MCA or MIC this time," said Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia political science lecturer Prof Dr P.Ramasamy.

Analysts said the "big surprise" was the voting trend among non-Malays in Chinese majority-Pulau Pinang.

They said while the majority of the urban Chinese have traditionally backed the DAP, this time, they chose to dump the DAP, including its secretary-general Lim Kit Siang and deputy chairman Karpal Singh.

A Universiti Malaya lecturer who declined to be named, said the strong support by the non-Malays to the BN has increased their "bargaining power" in the government.

Another clear indicator is the Sabah-Sarawak factor. The two non-Malay majority states contributed 45 of the 48 parliamentary seats to the BN, thus ensuring its two-thirds majority.

Analysts believed that the vote split in the Malay community between Umno and Pas led to the defeat of many Umno candidates.

Acknowledging this was Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak who said that the voting trend of Malays who favoured the opposition was a signal to Umno to work harder to ensure the success of the party and the BN in future.

Najib should know this more than others because he was almost a casualty in the election, winning his parliamentary seat with a majority

drastically cut to only 241 votes from over 10,000 previously in the predominantly Malay constituency.

-- BERNAMA

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