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Of politics and art of the possible

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POLITICS is the art of the possible, the late Deputy Prime Minister, Tun Dr Ismail once said in a debate in the Dewan Rakyat.

It is remembered now as the results of the Sabah election are being analysed and a post-mortem conducted by political parties which failed namely Parti Bersekutu and Pas.

No one would ever say that Bersekutu leader, Datuk Harris Salleh didn't know the law of the land. As former Chief Minister he had travelled extensively throughout the State. Nonetheless he lost the following election, and contributing to his defeat was the loss of the Kadazandusun votes.

But this time around after biding his time he had fielded candidates in all 48 constituencies and boldly predicted 40 would win.

In the end the score was nil, and 29 Bersekutu candidates lost their deposits.

The score was zero also for Pas despite active campaigning and strong coverage in Harakah, the party organ.

An item on nomination day quoted unnamed political sources as saying that the party's entry into the State political arena was timely since it was already familiar to the populace.

Among party leaders who campaigned were vice-president Hassan Shukri and central committee member Subky Latif. Mention was then made of the prediction by Berita Sabah newspaper about "bad news" in store for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. Also on the hustings was Kelantan Menteri Besar's Press secretary, Haji Wan Ismail Wan Jusoh, who declared that Pas would become a strong opposition party if its candidates won.

Indeed, he added, it was not impossible for Pas to rule the State at a later stage since "Sabah is fertile ground for Islam".

Reported on the eve of voting was party president Datuk Fadzil Noor's statement at Tanjung Batu Laut, near Tawau, that Barisan Nasional might not rule the country any longer after the next general elections.

There was mention that more than 70,000 people, including Umno members, had joined the party and that many Umno branches had been voluntarily dissolved.

Quote: "I must inform Sabahans that the rejection trend against the Barisan Nasional, especially Umno, in Peninsular Malaysia is overwhelmingly self-evident. As such Sabahans must join this massive wave of change".

In the end, however, the six Pas candidates collected 1,352 votes only, and all lost their deposits. Meanwhile Umno Sabah won all the 24 seats it contested.

Deputy Umno President, Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, was among party leaders from the centre most active in the campaign.

The contests will continue in the Parliamentary election later, and also taking part will be foreign journalists who are evidently no less determined to change the course of the nation's history.

Screened on CNN after all the Sabah election results were in was a report by its Asian correspondent about phantom voters and an accusation to that effect by PBS leader, Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan.

There was talk about 30,000 illegal immigrants from southern Philippines and Indonesia.

Reportage by foreign journalists was as described in Mingguan Malaysia,

Berita Harian and English-language papers. Even in the Singapore Straits Times.

As was later ascertained the BN operations room in Sabah had already known at around 10.30pm last Saturday that it could form the State Government having gained a simple majority.

And yet there was the following story filed by K. Baranee Krishnan through Reuters news agency at 10.55pm: "Early indicators showed the outcome of the polls could be close for the 73-year-old leader, who has held power since 1981, political allies said".

Not to be beaten was the American news agency Associated Press which reported at 10.13pm: "Despite the early lead, political observers said the outcome was too close for comfort for Dr Mahathir, who hopes for a resounding two-thirds majority in the 48-seat State assembly. His party needed 25 seats to form a Government".

Scoring a blooper was Peter Starr, the AFP bureau chief who said that the BN would be defeated. It was based on a public opinion poll which appeared in the Borneo Post on Saturday.

Reports predicting doom for the BN appeared in the International Herald Tribune, Far Eastern Economic Review and the Asian Wall Street Journal.

Of interest, therefore, in the context of things is the following report datelined Singapore: "Foreign television stations which broad-cast in Singapore will be subjected to the same rules applied to local networks on domestic coverage to prevent them from under-mining the republic, said a Government Minister.

"Just look at the way the foreign channels have become part of the domestic politics in Malaysia and Indonesia. We should worry for ourselves.

"If we are not careful, foreign broadcasters, like foreign newspapers, can undermine some of our important policies," Information and Arts Minister George Yeo said.

The speech by the Singaporean minister which appeared in the Singapore Straits Times was also transmitted by foreign news agencies to their subscribers.

But the part about Malaysia and Indonesia was not mentioned. Several years ago a British newspaper published a story about the fate of a tribesman captured in a tribal war in Sabah centuries ago.

He was placed in a wooden cage which was then brought to the top of a hill and there he was speared to death. A drawing to that effect accompanied the tale.

We commend the story to those foreign journalists and locals working for them who use their lap-tops, PCs and other things to also spear their targets. They failed in Sabah.

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