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PM's hard work pulls BN through

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IT is not always easy to share Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's confidence. Not even after the Barisan Nasional had been returned with more than two-thirds majority in the Dewan Rakyat in the just-concluded general election.

The pessimists will think not in terms of the BN's success but of the setback it suffered.

The failure to recapture Kelantan, the defeat in Terengganu and loss of many seats in other States tend to overshadow the decisive victory.

While many of his lieutenants are going around looking for scapegoats and flaying voters for not supporting them, Dr Mahathir keeps his disappointment, if any, largely to himself.

If he has any misgiving about the outcome of the election, he does not show it. It is not surprising, therefore, that his undiminished confidence gives whoever he touches the inspiration and the will to go on.

It was the combination of this and his tireless campaigning that pulled the BN through.

And when the results were less than satisfactory in some aspects, he once again repaired the shattered confidence of party members and workers by telling them that he was more than happy with the outcome.

Seeing him fielding questions from journalists in the wee hours of Tuesday (the Press conference was held at 3am), brought back memories of the 1990 general election when the BN fared worse.

When one after another seat fell to the Opposition, I asked him privately if the poor results were all right for the BN, and he calmly replied: "It's okay. The BN still has the two-thirds majority."

THE 1990 results were the worst for Dr Mahathir since his first general election as Prime Minister in 1982.

The BN started the hustings with Parti Bersatu Sabah, which had 13 parliamentary seats, defecting to the opposition front just after nomination.

The final count gave the BN 127 seats, securing the two-thirds majority by just seven seats in the 180-member Parliament. The DAP won 20, PBS 14, the now defunct Parti Melayu Semangat 46, eight and Pas, seven. Four seats went to independent candidates. The BN's popular votes fell to 53.38 per cent in the parliamentary race.

The results of the just-concluded election are generally better than those of 1990 although in some specific instances they are worse than the 1969 results. Tabulation by the NST gives the BN 54.8 per cent of the votes.

This is, of course, considerably poorer than 1995 when the BN had the best ever results. In that general election, it won 65.15 per cent of the parliamentary votes and bagged 162 seats. It subsequently gained more seats through crossovers and the return of S46 to the Umno fold.

State-by-State analysis of Monday's voting shows that the BN received the best support in Johor with 70.55 per cent of the votes, followed by Sarawak (65.95) and Sabah (58.72).

The worst performance was in Kelantan where it obtained only 38.25 per cent followed by Terengganu (40.56) and Kuala Lumpur (49.74).

The close contest saw BN doing well in Penang although it obtained only 50.37 per cent of the votes.

Perlis recovered well from the shock of the Arau by-election defeat to

Pas. The BN secured 55.27 per cent of the votes - the highest among the northwestern States.

Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim's hard work and his good choice of candidates helped the BN to hold back Pas' advance by winning all the three Dewan Rakyat seats and 12 of the 15 State seats.

In Kedah and Perak, where the advance by Pas had been most visible among the west coast States, the BN obtained 54.58 and 54.08 per cent of the votes respectively.

In Kedah, the BN conceded eight of the 15 Dewan Rakyat seats and 12 of the 36 State seats to Pas. A Cabinet Minister - Datuk Paduka Abdul Hamid Othman - was unseated in Sik and in Pendang, Pas president Datuk Fadzil Noor was elected to Parliament for the first time.

A HISTORICAL perspective is useful. History does not lie. The outcome in Kedah is reminiscent of the 1969 Alliance debacle when Pas took eight and Gerakan, then an opposition party, two of the State's 24 seats.

The Alliance, the BN's predecessor, obtained 53.1 per cent of the votes against Pas' 41.3 per cent and Gerakan's 5.6 per cent. It conceded three of the 12 parliamentary seats to Pas.

In that election, Information Minister, the late Senu Abdul Rahman, lost his seat and Tengku Abdul Rahman was saved by the Langkawi voters in his Kuala Kedah-Langkawi parliamentary seat.

He would later tell his supporters that had there been a bridge linking Langkawi to the mainland, he would have lost on the island as well.

Both Penang and Perak, which kept Pas out in many general elections, now have to contend with having its representatives poking at their rump for the next five years.

Pas' return to Perak is alarming. In its southward advance, it deprived Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Megat Junid Megat Ayob of a victory in the Parit parliamentary seat.

The unexpected success must have been extremely sweet for Pas since it was in Perak that it scored its first electoral win. The party won a solitary seat in Kerian in the 1955 Federal Legislative Assembly election. It now has two parliamentary and three State seats in the State.

The defeat in Terengganu might not have come as a complete surprise. Pas has been relentlessly attacking the State and it is common knowledge that internal squabbles had been a feature of the State Umno for years.

But the magnitude of the debacle is, nevertheless, shocking. The BN, which was represented almost exclusively by Umno, lost all the eight parliamentary seats and retained only four of the 32 State seats.

This is a performance far worse than in 1969 when the Alliance won four parliamentary seats and Pas two, and retained a simple 13:11 majority in the State Assembly.

Even Pahang and Selangor came under assault. Although Pas did not win a single parliamentary seat, it did win six State seats in Pahang and four in Selangor.

In several areas, it came close to defeating BN heavyweights. National Unity and Social Development Minister Datin Paduka Zaleha Ismail pulled through with a majority of 803 votes in Gombak and Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, 241 votes in Pekan.

Only three southernmost States - Negri Sembilan, Johor and Malacca - are still free of the "green tide" for which credit must go to their respective Menteris Besar and Chief Minister. But even they must be forewarned of Pas' waiting game.

If history is a reliable guide, salvation may well come from Terengganu. It started off as an Alliance State but was lost to Pas in 1959. The Alliance regained it in 1964 but nearly lost it in 1969.

The BN ruled supreme in 1974 and remained in power for 35 years despite

the ever present challenge from Pas.

To reverse its fortunes in Kelantan and Terengganu and to build a fire wall in Kedah, Umno has to give careful thought to nurturing new and better leadership.

The poor performance in these States could not have been due to the strength of the Opposition alone. The weakness of the BN leadership was equally to be blamed.

FINALLY, there is something that I must do although I must confess I am not totally comfortable with it. I am dedicating the following to Hajah Che Ah Said - my mother and Dr Mahathir's staunch supporter.

The thought of having to live for another five years in a Pas-controlled constituency breaks her heart. Especially when she knows that my uncle, Haji Salleh Tahir, my father's younger brother, is rejoicing.

To Che Ah, the creature of politics, the loss on Monday of the Pendang parliamentary constituency in Kedah to Pas eroded her self-confidence and esteem.

"Mak malu sungguh-sungguh cik ooi!" (I am really ashamed), she told me on the phone when I called her on Wednesday to enquire how she was getting along after the election.

She told me that my father, Haji Jasin Tahir, had not gone to town since Tuesday for fear of being taunted by Pas supporters. She could not bear seeing him craving for his favourite nasi lemak, roti canai and kopi-o.

She pleaded: "Cik pi cakap kat Dr Mahathir. Bukan semua orang suka kat Barisan. Tapi kita ni sayang kat dia pasai dia ada otak."

In simple English, "go tell Dr Mahathir not everyone likes Barisan. But we love him because he has brains".

My mother is a staunch Government supporter. Whether it was the kapal layar of the Alliance or the dacing of the BN, her support is assured.

So she had every reason to be upset when incumbent Datuk Othman Abdul of BN was defeated by Pas president Datuk Fadzil Noor.

In 1969 she cried for days when her one-term Member of Parliament, the plain Dr Mahathir, was defeated by Pas' Haji Yusof Rawa. She was devastated.

She partially regained her "political" dignity when, in 1974, the area reverted to the BN by virtue of Pas' membership of the coalition.

The BN succeeded in keeping the area in successive general elections although the State seat of Bukit Raya, in which my parents' house is located, has always been in Pas' hands except for a brief two-year period when the BN took it back in a by-election.

My mother also wanted me to tell the Prime Minister to stop all development in the Pas-controlled areas.

"Depa kata undi Pas masuk syurga. Projek depa dapat juga pasai BN bagi. Depa boleh dua-dua," she said in a high-pitched voice, alluding to the fact that Pas supporters had always claimed that they would go to heaven for voting Pas and still enjoy development brought to the people by the BN Government.

My mother always speaks in a high-pitched voice when she is angry. And she is especially angry with her brother-in-law Haji Salleh who is savouring the moment.

He is a die-hard Pas supporter and one of those who hope to go to heaven by voting Pas but do not mind enjoying what the BN Government has to offer.

So my emak forbids me from ever again helping Haji Salleh and other kin who support Pas. She says they are ungrateful.

Well emak, I hope someone will read and translate this for you. My mother is illiterate but she is the greatest mother there is.

Despite her buta huruf, she is always alive to the happenings around

her. She is as well informed on politics as some of those who call themselves politicians.

As for ayah (father), my advice is: go out and face the world. Enjoy your nasi lemak and damn your critics.

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