

18 DEC 1999

Razaleigh-Kelantan

UMNO HAS FUTURE IN KELANTAN DESPITE DEFEAT - KU LI

KOTA BAHARU, Dec 18 (Bernama) -- Umno has a good future in Kelantan despite its dismal performance there in the Nov 29 general election, state Umno chief Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah said today.

"Umno's future (in Kelantan) remains good...our people have strong fighting spirit. Losing once doesn't mean we must surrender," said Razaleigh who was appointed to the post only recently with the hope of helping the party wrest the state from PAS.

The former finance minister had returned to Umno earlier after helping the PAS-led coalition beat Umno in the state in the 1990 and 1995 elections.

To Razaleigh's dismay, Umno lost again in all but two of the 43 state constituencies this time. For parliamentary seats, he was the only one among the 14 Umno candidates in the state who managed to win.

The state Umno chief, however, said that the swing in support from Umno to PAS, at 4.8 per cent, was relatively small and it could be reversed.

He said the state Umno liaison committee had agreed at its meeting yesterday that Umno's defeat this time was not merely due to weaknesses in the party but also to "external factors".

He said the party found out that towards polling day, a large number of Kelantan people working outside the state returned home to make all sorts of accusations against the federal government.

"We could not do anything at this late stage although we had campaigned actively," he said.

Razaleigh said he accepted responsibility for Umno's big loss in Kelantan, and the question of him being made use of by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, as alleged by certain quarters, did not arise.

"We are all made use of and we all become tools of the party and the people," he said.

"But I voluntarily accepted this responsibility of leading Kelantan Umno and if we did not win, I am responsible for our failure," he added.

-- BERNAMA

rar sk