

21 SEP 1999

Mahathir-opposition

VOTING ALTERNATIVE FRONT MEANS GIVING COUNTRY TO FOREIGNERS

KANGAR, Sept 21 (Bernama) -- Voting the "Barisan Alternatif" (alternative front) means surrendering the country to foreigners, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today.

He said this was because the opposition front had agreed to do away with the selective currency control if they were to be elected to power.

"This means that they are willing to hand over the country to the IMF (International Monetary Fund)," he said at a news conference here, at the end of his two-day visit to Perlis.

He said his former deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim had blindly followed the directives of IMF such as increasing interest rate as well as reducing the government's budget and loans by financial institutions.

"If the people vote for the 'Barisan Alternatif', it means voting to surrender the country to foreigners," he said.

(The selective currency control, introduced by the government in September last year, has helped the country to overcome the economic downturn.

(In fact, the IMF, World Bank and other countries have acknowledged the effectiveness of the control measures in the country's economic recovery.)

Commenting on his nationwide tour, Dr Mahathir said he was encouraged by tremendous support from the people to the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN).

Perlis is the last leg of his nationwide tour.

He said he would make another round but not that intensive.

"It looks like the people appreciate my economic and political messages. They understand the issues now," he said.

Asked whether he would call for the general election now, Dr Mahathir:

"I am not in a hurry. I have to make another round (of tour) but not as intensive as this."

On the arrest of four political activists in connection with the recent clashes between Anwar's supporters and the police in the federal capital, he said the law must be respected by everyone, be they foreign journalists or local rioters.

Asked to comment on the threat by the group opposing to the independence of East Timor to attack United Nations (UN) peacekeepers if eight of the 13 districts were not handed over to them, Dr Mahathir hoped it would not reach to such end as war did not benefit anyone.

"I have never subscribed to the idea of going to war to settle a problem," he said.

--BERNAMA

jm abg