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Dr Mahathir: Ill-informed party workers contributed to BN's defeat in Lunas

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad agreed that party workers who were not well-informed about Government policies contributed towards the Barisan Nasional's defeat in the Lunas by-election.

However, he said there were other factors which enabled Parti Keadilan Nasional to win the seat.

Dr Mahathir said this today when asked to comment on former Deputy Prime Minister Tun Ghafar Baba's statement that BN lost because its party workers had problems explaining to the electorate policies like the Vision Schools.

The Prime Minister had earlier launched the Survey and National Mapping Department's e-commerce at Wisma Tanah.

On Ghafar's views that BN need not rely on rallies to win but must be willing to go to the grassroots, Dr Mahathir said this was practised by the coalition. "Wanita has done that. That's why we won in quite a lot of Malay areas."

He said BN could not even hold rallies as they were outnumbered by Opposition supporters who were brought to Lunas from all over the country.

To another question that BN component parties were blaming each other for the defeat - Umno Youth deputy chief Datuk Aziz Sheikh Fadzir tendered his resignation for the defeat only to retract it later - Dr Mahathir said this could be expected whenever there are setbacks.

"There will be disappointment and in times like this, when you are not your normal self, people make unwise decisions. We should wait for things to settle first and study them before we can determine who is right and who is at fault."

"When I went for my heart operation, the doctor advised me not to make decisions until I had recovered. The first few days you think the world has come to an end but you realise later it is still spinning around at the same rate and has not changed at all just because you are sick. The same thing applies here."

On Aziz's resignation (and retraction), Dr Mahathir felt it was made too early and with hindsight Aziz had changed his mind.

On whether it has become a culture for people to resign only to retract later, the Prime Minister replied:

"I don't know, maybe it is a culture but I don't think he (Aziz) has gained anything. There are those who threaten to resign because they want to get something for themselves.

"But I don't think he (Aziz) will get anything more ... not that he will become Youth chief because he resigned."

Meanwhile, MIC president Datuk Seri Samy Vellu said it was not right for any party to blame Aziz for BN's defeat in the Lunas by-election on Nov 29.

"During his 14 days in Lunas, Aziz worked very hard towards a BN victory," he said today.

Samy Vellu was commenting on reports that Aziz wanted to resign because of criticism against him for BN's failure to defend the Lunas seat in Kedah.

In the Lunas poll BN candidate S. Anthonysamy, who polled 9,981 votes, lost to Parti Keadilan Nasional's Saifuddin Nasution Ismail (10,511 votes).

Samy Vellu, who is Works Minister, admitted that BN's defeat was due to complacency and a lack of co-ordination within the BN election machinery.

"BN must have thought that this is a BN stronghold... Although we had the Sanggang (by-election) experience (behind us), we were not prepared for such an assault from the Opposition," he said.

Samy Vellu said the Opposition used dirty tactics and played on racial and religious issues, adversely affecting Anthony Samy's chances.

Samy Vellu said he wanted to put the matter to rest and nobody should be blamed over BN's defeat.

He said BN should now seriously work on strategies to win the seat back.

"We will get it back. It is a question of trial and error. As far as MIC is concerned, the party is thankful to the people of Lunas for their support all these years."

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