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The people are back with us, says Dr M (HL)

Abdul Razak Ahmad

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - The Government has acknowledged the electorate's disappointment against leaders who failed to serve the people as shown in last year's general election, but efforts to rectify this is paying off, the Prime Minister said.

The Barisan Nasional's victory in the Sanggang by-election on April 1 was part of the overall indication that the people were returning to the coalition and Umno, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

In Sanggang, BN's Redzwan Harun defeated Datuk Hishamuddin Yahaya of Pas with an increased majority. Redzwan polled 6,743 votes against Hishamuddin's 4,780, giving a majority of 1,963. The previous majority was 1,038.

"I believe there are signs in other places too that the electorate is back with Umno and the BN," Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president and BN chairman, said in an interview with Berita E-Umno, Umno's Internet newspaper.

Giving an insight into why some voters had polled for the Opposition in the Nov 29 election, Dr Mahathir said this was due to the lack of information given by the Government on some matters and this had confused the electorate.

In the interview, Dr Mahathir gave his message to Umno members, and shared his views on Umno's resurgence in regaining Malay support. He also offered some reasons behind the disunity among the Malays.

Dr Mahathir was asked whether he agreed with the view that Malay support for the Opposition in last year's election was "a show of protest" against certain leaders who they felt did not have the interest of the people at heart.

"There were such elements which were aimed at reminding the Government of certain leaders who did not discharge their duties well," he said, adding that such reminders were a blessing.

Many Malays were ready to renew their support for Umno, he said.

On continuous reminders by Umno leaders on the perils of Malay disunity, the Prime Minister said they were necessary.

If we did not warn the Malays for fear of offending them, there was a possibility they would continue with their detrimental ways, Dr Mahathir said.

"We are compelled to repeatedly remind them, for example on the need to be grateful, as it is for their own good," he said.

Calling on Umno members not to forget the party's objectives in the interest of the religion, race and country, Dr Mahathir said this was important because some members were placing their own interests above that of the party.

"That is why some of them are asking: 'I have been in the party for so long; what do I get?'"

The Prime Minister said some people might have felt that Umno's defeat would not adversely affect the Malays.

"This is wrong ... if there is a split and incapable people control or influence the Government, they may not be able to handle problems such as the economic downturn and may have to bow to foreign powers."

Asked whether the Government should propose that the ulama be more realistic and brave in helping to correct wrong interpretations and teachings of Islam by certain quarters, and thus prevent a split among the

Malays, Dr Mahathir said:

"Solicited or not, I feel they must be responsible to Islam and the faith of Muslims ... they must make known the true teachings of Islam."

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