

Dr M: Increased Malay support saw BN through

STAR 20 JUL 2002

KUALA LUMPUR: Barisan Nasional's victory in the Pendang by-election is due to an increase in Malay support for Umno and the progress made in opposition strongholds.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said: "It's not easy to convert the fanatics. I think we have done very well."

He pointed out that there were people who did not think or evaluate but merely followed what their leaders told them.

"Although their leaders do all kinds of things that are wrong from the Malay or Islamic point of view, these people will continue to support their leaders.

"If the opposition put a piece of wood as the candidate, they will vote for it. They will vote for the sign showing a symbol of the moon," Dr Mahathir told a press conference after attending the International Forum on Islam (Kalif 2002) at Sheraton Imperial Hotel here yesterday.

The Prime Minister was commenting on the Pendang and Anak Bukit by-elections, in which Barisan's candidate in Pendang, Datuk Othman Abdul, won by a majority of 283 votes over PAS' Dr Mohd Hayuti Othman.

PAS' Amiruddin Hamzah won the Anak Bukit state seat by 508 votes defeating Datuk Zakaria Said.

On whether Umno should disallow candidates from standing in elections for more than three terms, Dr Mahathir said it should not be a factor.

He said he had won as a candidate six times, adding that there was nothing wrong in placing a seasoned candidate in any election.

"It's not as simple as that," he added.

Dr Mahathir said Umno had won the support it lost prior to the 1999 general election, adding that the party had won over 3,000 voters in the by-elections.

On the possible Malay split over PAS' hudud laws, Dr Mahathir said there was

no such thing as hudud laws, adding that what existed was PAS laws.

He said the hudud laws proposed by PAS were unfair and created to hoodwink Malays and Muslims.

"When their laws are not just, it is not Islamic. They use the word 'hudud' to justify they are an Islamic party," he added.

On repercussions of the by-elections in the next general election, Dr Mahathir said he hoped PAS supporters would be dispersed so that they would not be able to be as violent as seen in the by-elections.

"They jammed the place and stopped buses carrying Barisan supporters. They don't care about law and order.

"They seem to think that by using strong arm tactics, they can win. We'll have to think about how to handle this," he added.

■ More reports on
Pages 4 & 6