

14/10/2002

PM: Voters knew BN would win

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DENGKIL, Sun. - The low voter turnout in the Gaya parliamentary by-election yesterday was due to the Barisan Nasional's victory being a foregone conclusion, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said some voters were not even in the constituency yesterday.

"I think many supporters knew that the Barisan Nasional would win, that's why they did not come out to vote," he said.

Voter turnout was 44.73 per cent, the lowest ever in by-election nationwide. Of the 49,427 voters registered, only 22,100 went to the ballot box.

BN candidate Liew Teck Chan, also a SAPP vice-president, won by a 11,923 vote majority.

Dr Mahathir said this was nearly a 300 per cent increase in votes from the 1999 general election when Datuk Yong Teck Lee won the seat by 4,117 votes.

"Even though the number of votes was small, it is nearly a 300 per cent increase. Not many came to vote, but it's only a by-election, not a change of government," Dr Mahathir said at a Press conference at the end of his visit to the Paya Indah Wetlands' first anniversary carnival here.

The DAP's Dr Hiew King Cheu obtained 3,716 votes while Parti Keadilan Nasional's Christina Liew won 2,613. There were 132 spoilt votes.

On the call by Gua Musang MP Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah for Dr Mahathir to reconsider giving up his Kubang Pasu seat in the next general election, Dr Mahathir said his decision to leave Government was final.

"I've made my decision. I am not going to change my mind again," he said.

"I've been a wakil rakyat (Member of Parliament) for a long time, it's time for someone else."

Tengku Razaleigh yesterday said Dr Mahathir should reconsider his decision not to contest in the general election for the sake of the country.

Dr Mahathir said he would not retire completely from the political scene as he intended to campaign for the BN.

"I will help campaign for BN, for Umno. I will have more free time to do that. Now I have no free time at all."

On the call by an Iranian militant group for Muslims to form a volunteer army to free Palestine from Israel, Dr Mahathir said such efforts would be futile.

"What for? When we fight, we should fight in a way that ensures victory. In this manner (voluntary army), what do you achieve? It is not a question of the number of volunteers but about strength."

Asked about a final decision on the implementation of teaching Science and Mathematics in English, Dr Mahathir said it was still being discussed and a decision would be announced soon.

Among the considerations were whether any schools should be exempted from the move next year, and ways to ensure that children would remain proficient in their mother tongue.