

01/04/2004

Improving on the record

By A Kadir Jasin

HISTORY has always sided a new Prime Minister in his first general election. Tun Abdul Razak Hussain, Tun Hussein Onn and Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad all did well in their first general elections.

Razak, who transformed the Alliance into the larger Barisan Nasional (BN), won 135 out of 154 parliamentary seats and captured all the state legislative assemblies in 1974. Pas was then a member of the BN.

Hussein ejected Pas from the BN in 1977 and a few months later in 1978 went on to win 131 seats. Dr Mahathir, feared by the non-Malays after being branded a Malay ultra by Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra, held his first election in 1982 and won 132 seats. Razak won 60.7% of popular votes, Hussein 57.2% and Dr Mahathir 60.5%.

So, when Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi called his first general election, he had that favourable factor on his side, although not many commentators and analysts cared to elaborate. History is not our strong point.

But by the close of voting on March 21, it became apparent that history would treat Abdullah even more favourably than his predecessors. Voters were decisively giving him the thumbs up.

Abdullah went on to do better than history, winning 198 out of 219 parliamentary seats, recapturing Terengganu - which was lost to Pas in the last general election - and nearly trouncing Pas in Kelantan. In the process, he decisively beat back the party's green tide from the Malay belt and blunted its foray into non-traditional states like Pahang, Selangor and Johor.

It was a record victory. The BN won 90% of the parliamentary seats and 64% of popular votes.

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