

MCA retains Machap with lower majority
Malaysiakini.com
April 12, 2007
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After nine days of intensive campaigning, the Barisan Nasional today retained its stronghold state seat in Machap with a comfortable victory despite a slightly reduced majority.

BN candidate Lai Meng Chong (photo, left), 56, defeated 33-year-old DAP candidate Liou Chen Kuang by a 4,081-vote majority.

This is 481 votes less than the majority achieved three years ago - the 2004 general election.

Lai, who was the political secretary to minister and MCA vice-president Dr Fong Chan Onn gained 5,533 votes while Liou, who contested in the seat for the second time garnered 1,452 votes.

There were surprisingly a rather high number of spoilt votes - 166.

Returning officer Hasim Ismail made the announcement, which was carried live on television, at about 8.30pm at the Kompleks Japerun in Machap. Also present was Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak.

The reduced majority for BN is significant as the Machap by-election has been dubbed as a test on voters sentiment in the lead-up to the next general election which could be held as early as later this year.

BN's victory today was however marred by allegations of vote-buying following a police report lodged by the DAP this afternoon.

The coalition has also come under fire for pouring millions of ringgit for infrastructure development projects during the campaign.

Some 74.35 percent of the voters went to the polls today in what appeared to be a sunny day - bar the downpour 20 minutes before the pollings closed. In 2004, the voter turnout for the constituency was almost identical at 74.33 percent.

The Machap state seat fell vacant following the death of incumbent Poh Ah Tiam, 55, from the BN on March 15 due to kidney ailment.

In the 2004 general election, Poh beat the same DAP candidate with a majority of 4,562 votes.

Convincing majority

In an immediate reaction, the winning candidate Lai thanked his party leadership, the Barisan Nasional top brass and voters for showing their faith in him.

"I will work hard for the people of Machap," he said.

Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who went live on national television immediately after the result was announced, congratulated the victor and said that the reduction in the majority was expected as more people had turned out to vote today.

"However, we must study as to why there are voters in Machap who vote for the opposition," he said.

His deputy Najib, who oversaw the BN preparation for the by-election, said the win today indicated the people's faith in Abdullah's leadership.

"It was a convincing majority," he said. He also rejected opposition claims that the BN used corrupt practices to obtain votes.

"No, we don't buy votes," he said.

Malacca Chief Minister Mohd Ali Rustam said the victory showed overwhelming support of the people of Machap to Barisan Nasional.

Flawed result

Meanwhile, MCA president Ong Ka Ting thanked Abdullah, Najib and Rustam for the leadership that provided this victory.

As for Liou, he told malaysiakini that he was disappointed with the result and hoped Lai would work hard for the people of Machap.

"This is the choice of the voters. We worked very hard and are quite disappointed with the result," he said.

While the opposition party was able to slash the majority by 481 votes, its candidate improved his tally by only 167 votes.

DAP secretary general Lim Guan Eng said Lai's victory was not an honourable victory for BN.

"It is a flawed result marred by vote buying, violence, intimidation and bribery," he told malaysiakini.

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