

Dr Mahathir on winning poster wars but losing polls
Malaysiakini.com
April 23, 2008

Politicians and their supporters are fond of stringing up gigantic photos of leaders, with the belief that it will help boost their popularity.

Apart from being an eyesore and waste of funds, former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad warned that it could actually have the opposite effect.

The 83-year-old statesman considered this as one of the contributing factors to the defeat of Barisan Nasional in the April 7 Bukit Selambau and Bukit Gantang by-elections.

The ruling coalition lost to Pakatan Rakyat, which chalked up bigger margins, despite Mahathir hitting the campaign trail as well.

Conceding that his presence did little to alter the fortunes of BN, he said: "I went to Bukit Gantang and Bukit Selambau to campaign. We lost in both places, lost with bigger margins.

"The papers reported that an independent post-mortem will be conducted. I hope the people doing this will question me also," he said in his blog.

In Bukit Gantang, Mahathir said there were lots of banners and posters.

"A lot of them showed the portraits of the candidate. But quite a lot showed the picture of the menteri besar (Zambry Abd Kadir)."

According to the former Umno president of two decades, there are certain quarters in the party who believe that if pictures of politicians are displayed everywhere, people are going to like and support them.

"So, huge billboards have been put up with huge portraits of the ministers and menteri besar. To show that the ministers are close to the prime minister, portraits of the PM are shown close to the minister concerned," he said.

Since a Mahathir posting would not be complete without taking a swipe at his successor Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's administration, he also trained his guns on former tourism minister Azalina Othman Said.

Without naming her, he noted that posters of the former tourism minister with Abdullah were seen everywhere.

"Maybe this is a tourist attraction," he quipped, adding that along Jalan Syed Putra in Kuala Lumpur, there was "a huge portrait of the fifth prime minister (Abdullah)."

'There were no big portraits of me'

Mahathir who ruled the nation for 22 years and whose portrait adorned swanky offices to barber shops, claimed that he never liked the idea of displaying his image.

"People are going to say that it was the same when I was PM. If you care to check you will

find that only the menteri besar had these billboards with their portraits and mine. Ministers did not in those days. Certainly there were no big portraits of me.

"In fact the first thing I did when appointed PM was to forbid pictures of me to be displayed even in offices. But they nevertheless put up my pictures," he said.

"I really don't think having huge portraits of politicians will make them popular. In fact, it is likely to make them very unpopular," he added.

Another practice which should be looked at, he said, is that of BN state governments, government parties as well as ministers taking full-page advertisements in the papers to congratulate the prime minister on his appointment and on other occasions.

"I can understand the private sector doing this but ministers and ministries should not be wasting public money doing this especially before the cabinet is named.

"I have lots of observations on the conduct of the two by-elections. But I will reserve them for the future," he said.

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