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# Sungai Besar voters snub Dr M

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**OPPOSITION TACTICS BACKFIRE:** BN's victory shows it has regained the support of the people

**B**ARISAN Nasional's (BN) astounding victory in Sungai Besar is clearly a snub to Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's campaign and marks a significant improvement in the coalition's popularity rating.

The former prime minister's moves against the present administration, including his role in the opposition pact's campaign, failed to garner the desired political traction for Parti Amanah Negara (PAN) and DAP. Last night's results were quite telling.

BN's Budiman Mohd Zohdi polled a 9,191 vote-majority against Pas's Dr Abdul Rani Osman and PAN's Azhar Abdul Shukur, surpassing the late Tan Sri Noriah Kasnon's highest vote-majority of



7,349 in 2004.

Observers noted that Dr Mahathir's blitzkrieg towards the end of the campaign period did not sit well with Muslim voters, especially as it was taking place in the holy month of Ramadan.

The harsh tone used, coupled with name-calling, against Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, for instance, turned off Sungai Besar voters, who prefer serenity and

a truce while observing the religious obligation of fasting.

PAN, whose campaign rounds were handled by DAP, had earlier expected Dr Mahathir's presence to bolster its chances at the polls.

Nobody expected a backlash from the Muslim community.

They were focused on undermining Pas and scoring the Chinese votes as per DAP's standard formulae, whose approach is tailored to cater to a single community.

Hence, PAN's dismal performance was anticipated as the party is quite rudderless in terms of its objective and niche.

Recouping the losses suffered in the last general election, Budiman's candidacy and campaign approach have enabled BN to regain a massive chunk of local support.

He won most of the 30 voting channels in the constituency, including two that were opened for early voting.

BN was adept and focused on handling local issues, particularly with regard to matters affecting fishermen, padi farmers and jobless youths in the PKR-led state.



Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad

The coalition's astute handling of issues, most prominently the timely return of two fishermen detained in Batam, Indonesia, boosted its credibility.

Unlike DAP, which went as far as erecting allegedly inflammatory or seditious billboards against PAN's rivals, BN and Pas adopted an orderly campaign strategy and did not resort to slander.

Despite their ideological differences, Budiman and Dr Rani embraced warmly when they crossed

paths at a polling station.

And, even though it was a three-cornered contest, BN even performed favourably among the Chinese community in the DAP-held state seat of Sekinchan, winning at least six out of 11 voting channels. The Chinese support helped to mitigate vote splitting among the Malays.

In the 13th General Election, voter turnout was 88 per cent. The Election Commission (EC) predicted a lower voter turnout of 70 per cent this time due to expectations that outstation voters might not bother to take part as only two years of the parliamentary term still remained.

Yesterday's voter turnout was four per cent higher than expected, which suggests that outstation Sungai Besar folk did take the trouble to return to cast their ballots.

There are 42,655 registered voters in the constituency, including 286 early voters who cast their ballots on June 14.