



Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob speaking with UCSI University students at the International Symposium on Malay Language Aspirations in Kuala Lumpur, yesterday. PIC BY AHMAD UKASYAH

'Party more important than candidates'

KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob has reminded Barisan Nasional members that the election candidates were unimportant compared with the party as a whole.

When asked about businessman Haslihelmy DM Zulhasli protesting against BN's choice of candidate for the Pelangai by-election to the point of running as an independent candidate, the former prime minister said that one should support the alliance to achieve victory.

"The candidates represent the image of a party, and Barisan Na-

sional's image has been tarnished in the six previous state elections," he said, emphasising that two states had no Umno candidates at all.

"We have to win the Pelangai seat, because Pahang has always been an Umno stronghold despite the lower number of seats in the previous general election.

"If we lose in Pelangai, the seating ratio would be 16-18 (BN-PN) compared with 17-17 before.

"There has been a shift in Malay voters in the previous six state elections, with many of them now choosing Perikatan Nasional.

"I believe it is important for Umno leaders to hold a meeting and discuss how to win back the hearts of Malay voters for future elections."

Speaking at the launch of the International Symposium on Malay Language Aspirations here, Ismail Sabri spoke about his concerns as Umno was a Malay-centric party, yet Malay support for it had been on the decline.

He said he hoped that Umno would retain the Pelangai seat and continue its nine-term winning streak.