

PM ACCEPTS PH'S DEFEAT

Govt will continue to champion the welfare of people, says Anwar

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THE unity government's resolve to maintain a united front and pursue policies that benefit the people remains unshaken despite the defeat in the Sungai Bakap by-election, said the prime minister.

The loss came against the backdrop of the country adapting to reforms undertaken by the Madani government, said Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

"The unity coalition respects and accepts the Pakatan Harapan candidate's defeat in the Sungai Bakap by-election, which was held smoothly and peacefully.

"As prime minister, I accept the voice of the people in the state constituency with great humility."

The unity government would continue to keep its finger on the pulse of the people and to champion their cause, he added.

It would maintain a united front as it carried out policies and initiatives that reflected current realities, he said.

Perikatan Nasional retained the seat in Penang on Saturday.

Abidin Ismail obtained 14,489 votes, defeating Pakatan Harapan's Dr Joohari Ariffin, who gained 10,222 votes.

Abidin had a 4,267-vote majority against Joohari, a higher ma-



Party flags being hoisted in Sungai Jawi during the campaign for the Sungai Bakap by-election recently. Perikatan Nasional retained the state seat in Penang on Saturday. PIC BY DANIAL SAAD

majority for PN compared with the results in the state election last August.

Penang PKR chief Nurul Izzah Anwar said there was a need for introspection after the party's loss.

She said the result served as a reminder that the party could not get too comfortable and must work hard to win the support of the people.

She said PKR took full responsibility for PH's defeat.

"We accept this as a challenge in our struggle.

"While respecting the choice of the people of Sungai Bakap, it is disheartening to see the prevalence of racial attacks and slander to influence sentiments."

Nurul Izzah, a former Permatang Pauh member of parliament, said there was a need to focus on resolving core issues affecting the people, including their welfare, education and de-

velopment.

Umno Supreme Council member Datuk Dr Puad Zarkashi said the by-election results were a clear signal of the trust deficit between the federal administration and the people, who were unhappy with the government's performance.

"Just accept the defeat in Sungai Bakap. Let's not make excuses or try to identify a 'formula' why we lost (the by-election)," he said on Facebook.

The Johor assembly speaker said the momentum of the unity government's victory in the Kuala Kubu Bharu by-election in Selangor had fizzled out.

This, Puad said, was due to a number of decisions and actions by the federal government after the by-election on May 11, adding that it had given the opposition "bola tanggung" (easy shots) that were used as campaign fodder in Sungai Bakap.

"Do not get carried away after winning the Kuala Kubu Bharu by-election.

"Do not hastily pull off a surprise. Do not ignore the concerns of the people. Remove those (members of the cabinet) who do not perform."

Pasir Gudang member of parliament Hassan Abdul Karim said a proper narrative through actions was needed to allow people to put food on the table and not be burdened by the rising cost of living.

"When inflation decreases and workers' wages increase, maybe a large part of the people, especially the B40 and M40 groups, will adopt a more friendly attitude and support PKR, PH and the Madani government."

While he agreed with the federal government's efforts to strengthen the economy, he said people were unhappy because the increase in diesel prices caused the prices of other goods to increase.

"The political narrative was not in favour (of the government) when the diesel subsidy was partially withdrawn after the government increased the Sales and Services Tax from six to eight per cent for certain goods."

Opposition leader Datuk Seri Hamzah Zainudin said the outcome of the by-election highlighted PN's support among Malays.

Hamzah claimed that the coalition's victory indicated its popularity as a political platform, regardless of race.

He said retaining the seat was a "referendum" against the government over issues, including the cost of living.

"It shows that people reject those who do not walk the talk.

"Thank you to all Sungai Bakap voters and congratulations to the PN machinery that worked hard throughout the campaign."

Pas information chief Ahmad Fadhli Shaari said Sungai Bakap voters were unhappy with some approaches and policies of the federal government.

"It's a clear signal that the voters rejected the rationalisation of diesel subsidy, which burdens many consumers.

"Even though the Sungai Bakap state seat is in the Nibong Tebal parliamentary constituency, which is represented by a minister, PH still failed to attract voters." **Additional reporting by Sharifah Mahsinah Abdullah**