

Dr M: Nepotism issue is over ⁵⁵

By WAN HAMIDIHAMID
and ESTHER NG

KUALA LUMPUR: The issue of nepotism and cronyism is considered closed as far as Umno is concerned, with the party's Youth chief Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi accepting that such practice did not prevail in Malaysia.

Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Zahid now believed that there was no nepotism and cronyism. After the issue was extensively discussed at last night's supreme council meeting.

"Initially, there were

suspicions and prejudices among Umno Youth but after we had released the list (of privatised government projects and special shares allocations), it was clear such practice does not exist in Malaysia.

"Datuk Zahid also accepted the explanation. So, the question of nepotism and cronyism does not arise anymore," he told reporters after chairing the Umno supreme council meeting which ended just after midnight.

Zahid had raised the issues in his keynote address at the Youth assembly on June 18, resulting in the Prime Minister's decision to release the list

of names of those who were privileged to be given the Government's privatised projects and special shares allocations.

Winding up the speech at the end of the general assembly on June 21, the Prime Minister had mentioned Zahid by name, advising him to use the proper channel such as the supreme council, to bring up issues instead of voicing out grouses in public.

When asked whether Zahid had accepted the explanation at last night's meeting, Dr Mahathir referred the question to Zahid, who said: "It's over."

On whether the issue of

^{S 10.7.98}
nepotism and cronyism was the cause of Barisan Nasional's defeat in the Arau parliamentary by-election, the Prime Minister said the choice of Ismail Kassim, who is Perlis Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim's younger brother, was just a coincidence.

"If we have a better candidate, we will pick the person. Since he (Ismail) got the highest vote (to be chosen as Barisan candidate), we chose him," he said.

On July 4, PAS candidate Hashim Jasin polled 12,864 votes against Ismail's 11,541 in the Arau by-election. The seat fell va-

cant following the death of Kamaruddin Ahmad on May 25.

Dr Mahathir said Barisan lost due to PAS' intense Campaigning, using students and making visits to voters' homes to influence them.

He also said Barisan was over-confident in winning the seat, particularly when it had won with a majority of almost 7,000 in 1995.

"We had not expected to lose but it's a good reminder for us or else we will lose touch," he said, adding that there would be a post-mortem and a report made by Shahidan and Perlis Umno.

Dr Mahathir said the opposition party also brought in members from Kelantan, Perlis and Kedah to give more support while Umno's work coordination was not too good.

Asked if he thought PAS' victory meant that the party was becoming more influential, the Umno president said: "This is just a by-election. They really needed to win this one."

"I think (Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk) Nik Aziz Nik Mat was there all the time during the campaign. This is a great victory for them but this does not mean PAS will win (the next election)."