

10/07/1998

Foreign propaganda had hand in Arau loss, says PM

Fadzil Ghazali

FOREIGN propaganda on nepotism and cronyism had a hand in the Barisan Nasional (BN) defeat in the Arau parliamentary by-election, although a weak election machinery was cited as the main factor for the loss to PAS.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told a press conference after chairing an Umno Supreme Council meeting last night some voters were taken in by allegations of nepotism and cronyism in Government.

"The accusation of nepotism was made by foreigners, and locals tend to believe whatever the Westerners say," he said.

The meeting, which lasted nearly four hours till midnight, discussed the Arau defeat and charges of nepotism and cronyism raised during last month's Umno general assembly, the Umno president and BN chairman said.

The meeting explained to Umno Youth head Datuk Zahid Hamidi, who raised the issue during the Umno Youth assembly, that there is no nepotism or cronyism in Umno and the BN.

When asked if he expects the issue to crop up again, Dr Mahathir said the question should be posed to Zahid.

The Umno Youth chief's response was: "It's settled".

Dr Mahathir said reports on nepotism in the Government were used by PAS to win votes.

In addition, PAS had strengthened its election machinery with its leaders from Kelantan, Terengganu and Kedah going to Arau to campaign, he added.

"Generally, we feel our loss in Arau had more to do with PAS using students who were staying in homes of the voters. As such, they managed to change voters' perception of Umno."

Dr Mahathir conceded that Umno was also over-confident because the party had previously won by a big majority.

Dr Mahathir said in a way Umno's loss "is a good thing for the party because it will act as a reminder".

"Now, we know if we do not give our best efforts and overcome our differences, we will lose."

In the Arau by-election, BN candidate Ismail Kassim from Umno, who is the brother of Perlis Menteri Besar Tan Sri Shahidan Kassim, lost to PAS' Hashim Jasin by 1,323 votes.

(END)