

11 JUL 1998

Mahathir-Arau

LACK OF DEDICATION CAUSE OF BN DEFEAT IN ARAU- DR MAHATHIR

MELAKA, July 11 (Bernama) --Lack of dedication among Umno members is one of the causes for the defeat of the Barisan Nasional candidate in the Arau Parliamentary by-election on July 4, Prime Minister and Barisan Nasional Chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"While the opposition party was active and went about its struggle with zeal...Umno lacked such spirit. Umno thought it is bound to win and there is no need for us to work hard," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, was speaking to reporters after a closed door meeting the Melaka Umno Liaison Committee members.

Such lack of dedication could be dangerous to the party but the by-election result neverthelss taught a lesson to the party and created awwariness among members.

In the by-election, BN's Ismail Kassim lost to PAS candidate Hashim Jasin by 1,323 votes. Hashim polled 12,864 votes against the 11,541 for Ismail.

Asked how there could be lack of dedication among members when Umno had just held its General Assembly, Dr Mahathir said, "Arau was conidered an Umno stronghold and we were bound to win."

"The worst that can happen, we thought was, victory with a reduced majority and hence there is no need for us to put in too much work..we can win automatically. This is very dangerous thinking," he said.

Asked whether the increase in taxes on fruits taken from the jungle and the choice of the Menteri Besar's younger brother as a candidate were factors contributing to the defeat, Dr Mahathir said, "We cannot say that a particular result is due to one factor only."

"There are many reasons. I think the tax on the fruits was one of the causes and this was exploited by the opposition."

"The same with the choice of the candidate which was turned into an issue by the opposition. This had some effect and it all added up," Dr Mahathir said.

When told that among grassroot members there was a thinking that the General Election would be delayed because of the BN defeat in Arau, the Prime Minister said, " I do not know about that...that is the grassroot view...but the people who make the adjustments are others."

He said the defeat in Arau had indeed an effect in making Umno members realise how important it was for them to work even harder and with more zeal.

He said he told Melaka Umno leaders at today's meeting that they were in Umno to ensure the success of the party's struggle and not for their own sake.

He said apart from the reasons for the defeat in Arau, he also explained the reasons for the current economic slowdown and stressed the importance of members closing ranks in Umno and the BN.

The Prime Minister said he did not ask anything from the states in the economic recovery efforts but only that they understand the real reasons behind the downturn.

"Actually the downturn is caused by currency traders and they are trying to hoodwink the people by saying that the governments are at fault," he said.

Dr Mahathir said even though there was some weakness in the governments of the countries being attacked, the fact remained that currency traders

had caused the value of currencies to fall.

At the meeting, Melaka Chief Minister Datuk Seri Abu Zahar Isnin led the others present in reading out a pledge of loyalty to the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

The Umno Liaison Committee also expressed its support for the call that the posts of party president and deputy president be not contested next year.

-- BERNAMA

MKO NO AAM