

PM: Lies caused our defeat

Net 12 DEC 2000

'Opposition used Vision School issue to gain Chinese support'

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. Lies and threats hurled at the Barisan Nasional by opposition parties resulted in the BN's defeat in last month's Lunas by-election.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told the Dewan Rakyat today the Opposition had harped on the protest against Vision Schools, and had even spread lies to gain votes from the Chinese.

"They claimed that Chinese students in Vision Schools will be forced to wear skullcaps.

"This was spread by word of mouth but it proved to be very effective," he said when replying to a supplementary question from Kerk Kim Hock (DAP-Kota Melaka).

"Such campaigning tactics swayed votes from the Chinese who strongly supported the BN in the

1999 general election," said Dr Mahathir, who is BN chairman.

The impression was that their sudden change of heart and aversion towards the BN was attributed to the 83 demands by Suqui.

(Suqui is the acronym for Malaysian Chinese Organisation's Election Appeals Committee which claims to have more 2,095 associations affiliated to it.)

Kerk enquired whether Dr Mahathir's remarks on the Suqui demands angered the Chinese electorate in Lunas and caused the BN's defeat to Parti Keadilan Nasional.

To another question by Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail (Keadilan-Permatang Pauh), Dr Mahathir said Press freedom in Malaysia was well reflected in the many newspapers and websites which

spread anti-government sentiments.

"Most of them even spread lies. If their reports are to be taken as truths, then I have died four times, fell off a horse once and did not complete my haj."

Dr Mahathir said as there were many anti-government newspapers and websites, it was not accurate to claim that there was no Press freedom in Malaysia.

"In Malaysia, just like in other countries, the media is free to choose who it wants to support. They can support the Government, government parties or the Opposition," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said he stood by his statement at the International Convention on the Role of Media in Non-Aligned Countries on Sept 21

that "a government which controls the media is a government with no morals".

Dr Wan Azizah had asked Dr Mahathir whether his statement at the convention contradicted the actions of the Government which controlled the mainstream media and prevented the publication of articles which were not pro-government.

To a supplementary question by Mohamad Sabu (Pas-Kuala Kedah), Dr Mahathir said in Malaysia there were media organisations which supported the Government.

"The media is not owned by the Government. We only own government gazettes," he said.

Dr Mahathir said even in countries like Britain and the United States, the media took sides.

"If we go to Britain, we will find that newspapers like *Daily Mirror* and the *Guardian* support certain parties. That is their right.

"In the United State, there are Republican papers and Democrat papers. In fact, now you have Republican judges and Democrat judges.

"Democrat judges will be in favour of a Democrat. If it is a Republican judge, he will choose Bush . . . and we will support him," Dr Mahathir said in jest.

Dr Mahathir said in Malaysia, some of the Opposition papers spread lies.

"So newspapers that support the Government try to correct the untruths spread by these papers."