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Parliament-Mahathir (Lunas)

BN LOST LUNAS BECAUSE OF OPPOSITION THREATS AND LIES, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 11 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Barisan Nasional (BN) failed to defend the Lunas state seat in last month's by-election because of threats by so many opposition supporters besides the lies and accusations they hurled at the BN.

He told the Dewan Rakyat today that one of the tactics used to woo the Chinese voters was to harp on the protest against vision schools which was an issue among the Chinese electorate there in the Nov 29 by-election.

"They claimed that Chinese students in vision schools will be forced to wear skullcaps. This was spread widely 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 tactic swayed votes from the Chinese, who strongly supported the BN in the 1999 general election resulting in the defeat of two DAP leaders namely Lim Kit Siang and Karpal Singh, 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, the Chinese pressure group, to the government before the 1999 general election, he said.

Kerk enquired whether Dr Mahathir's remarks on the Suqui demands which angered the Chinese electorate in Lunas caused the BN to lose the seat to Keadilan in the by-election.

Dr Mahathir said Suqui claimed to be representing 2,000 Chinese associations but it was not certain whether it held meetings with affiliates to discuss the 83 demands and whether sensitivities and views of the other races were taken into consideration.

"I did not get any report... even the Chinese newspapers did not report about such meetings being held.

"All of a sudden a few people came with up with this memorandum making all sorts of ridiculous demands to get rid of the rights of the Malays and the other Bumiputera," Dr Mahathir said emphasising the importance of taking the sensitivities of the other races into account when making demands of such nature.

He said the fact remained that the Malays and Bumiputera were still left behind, citing statistics that in terms of enrolment to universities alone, perhap less than 25 per cent of them deserved admission if based on merit.

"Without government contracts, Malay contractors may not get any contract at all. This proves that without special rights, they may not get any contract at all. So also is the case with opportunities for education," said Dr Mahathir who acknowledged that the government cared a little more for the Malays because of they were still weak.

Dr Mahathir said although the government set aside 60 per cent of places in local universities for Bumiputera, the number of Bumiputera professionals and other graduates produced locally and by overseas universities was still low.

The prime minister said since the Suqui did not take these facts into account, he believed the Chinese pressure group did not at all make thorough study before coming out with its demands.

He regarded the Suqui demands as a threat directed at the BN and the timing was perfect with the advent of the last general election.

"The DAP is no different... DAP even supports the formation of an Islamic state to win support..by colluding (with PAS)...," Dr Mahathir said to loud tapping of the table by government back-benchers.

Immediately Kerk and several other DAP MPs rose and called Dr Mahathir a liar but the prime minister retorted back: "I am not lying, more so not during the fasting month, I am speaking the truth.I am serious in my reply."

Dr Mahathir criticised the DAP, which he said, inflamed racial sentiments at a time when the BN was all out consolidating inter-racial goodwill.

He said in Malaysia the Chinese are treated very fairly and unlike Chinese in other countries, for instance, only in Malaysia are they allowed to set up Chinese schools.

"The Chinese, Indians and the Malays get moderate treatment. No one community will ever get 100 per cent whatever they demanded.Even the Malays did not get their demands 100 per cent because if they get 100 per cent treatment this means we are not being fair to the other races," he said.

Replying to a supplementary question from Dr Tan Seng Giaw (DAP-Kepong), Dr Mahathir, while chiding PAS, said many only talked about the Suqui demands without bothering to read to the last word the entire content of the demands simply because they had no principles.

Dr Mahathir denied Tan's allegations at his recent meeting with the Suqui at the prime minister's office, only Dr Mahathir did the talking.

The prime minister told the House that during the meeting he also sought for a briefing on the demands and the memorandum the delegation submitted.

"It is true that I explained to them the racial problem in our country, the perils of taking the matter to the public.. demands like wanting to do away with the difference in status for the Bumiputera and non-Bumiputera are too sensitive for discussion," he said.

The prime minister told the House that his meeting with the Suqui delegation was in an amicable atmosphere and that he even had a photo session with the delegation members.

They also asked him what they should tell the Press about the meeting, Dr Mahathir said.

"I have very good expectations as they were very nice and courteous and politely asked me what statement they could give to the Press and I suggested that they should say our meeting was in an atmosphere of goodwill," said Dr Mahathir.

However, the prime minister said he was very disappointed that the moment the general election was imminent, statements playing on strong racial sentiments among the Chinese were issued, for which he said the methods used were similar to the DAP's.

-- BERNAMA

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