

01 DEC 2000

Mahathir-Lunas

DIRTY TACTICS AND THUGGERY BY OPPOSITION LED TO BN'S DEFEAT IN LUNAS

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 1 (Bernama) -- Dirty tactics and thuggery employed by the opposition were among factors that resulted in the Barisan Nasional's defeat in the Lunas state seat by-election in Kedah two days ago, said Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The Prime Minister said the opposition resorted to various forms of deception and hooliganism to intimidate voters and BN election canvassers, including the womenfolk, in Lunas.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, said he was concerned that with the opposition resorting to such methods in campaigning, peace in the country could be undermined.

"They should have faced the by-election calmly and appeal with their speeches as to why the people should vote for them," he told reporters after chairing a three-hour Umno Supreme Council meeting here today.

He said there are valid reasons to amend the Election Act, as proposed by MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, in view of the theory held by the opposition that police would not take action if thousands or tens of thousands of people broke the law.

Dr Mahathir said tens of thousands of opposition supporters from outside Lunas had converged in the constituency and some 120,000 of them were there on the eve of polling while at other times, up to 100,000.

"This means they ferry in people from outside and we do not know if this involves phantom voters. On the other hand, they stopped BN party workers who went there not to vote but to help out our election workers there," he said.

Dr Mahathir said opposition supporters stopped and seized the identity cards of BN party workers in 12 buses despite such acts being unlawful.

He said the BN had never resorted to such acts and that it will study if legal action can be pursued.

"But, if we are to take legal action, they will call us cruel and appeal to their supporters overseas and the foreign media to brand us cruel for taking action," he said.

He said the opposition also fanned religious sentiments by claiming that Muslims could not vote for non-Muslims and distributing posters of BN candidate S. Anthonysamy purportedly dressed as a priest.

"It is the face of the BN candidate but somebody else's body ... this is new technology, superimposing the image on someone else. This is cheating by a party that claims to want to set up a just government," he said in showing one of the posters concerned to the media.

Dr Mahathir said other deceptions used by the opposition include alleging that he had brought in Jews and distributing copies of a letter he had allegedly written to former Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman.

"Very soon they will use the computer to produce a nude picture of me. All this is cheating but unfortunately, voters are taken in," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the BN defeat in Lunas was discussed at length by the Supreme Council and a post-mortem showed there were some Umno weaknesses as well.

"But, we are not going to divulge these weaknesses," he said.

He noted the BN had an increase in the number of votes obtained compared to that in the general election.

Dr Mahathir said Umno has identified steps to be taken to regain its influence, not only in Lunas but elsewhere.

Asked if Supreme Council member Datuk Shahril Samad had repeated in the meeting a statement he made in Malaysiakini.com yesterday, Dr Mahathir said it was Shahril's personal views but declined to reveal if it was discussed in the meeting.

Shahril was reported to have said several statements made by Dr Mahathir recently and the use of his posters had contributed to the BN defeat in Lunas.

"It has not backfired, it's good for us to have my posters. We have won hundreds of other elections with my poster. Before, when Tunku Abdul Rahman was the president, we used his poster and we won. And, we have not lost yet," said Dr Mahathir.

-- BERNAMA

AR AR THG