

24/11/2000

Dr M bares Opposition's aim

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The Opposition will resort to any means to split the Malays and weaken their support for Umno, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said this was why Opposition parties such as Keadilan were using religious and racial issues during the campaigning for the forthcoming Lunas State by-election in Kedah.

He said this was being done despite the fact that a majority of constituents were non-Muslims.

"For the Opposition, no matter what happens, this is acceptable as long as they can split the Malays," Dr Mahathir told a Press conference after opening a seminar on Islamic Development and the Threat of Deviant Teachings at Seri Kembangan, near here.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, felt that the Opposition was not really perturbed with being spurned by non-Muslims when playing up religious or racial issues.

The Lunas constituency is made up of 43.4 per cent Malays, 37 per cent Chinese and 19.1 per cent Indians.

An Opposition win in Lunas next Thursday would deny the Barisan Nasional a two-thirds majority in the State Assembly.

However, the Opposition win would still be of little consequence in the State, unless the State Assembly wants to amend the constitution.

Dr Mahathir said by splitting the Malays, the Opposition hoped to weaken Umno.

"If Umno is weakened, the Opposition will achieve its ultimate objective, which is to secure the release of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim from prison."

The Prime Minister said because of this, the Opposition did not care about the effects of its tactics on Islam, the Malays and the various races.

Dr Mahathir was asked whether such Opposition tactics would manage to persuade voters into supporting them.

"There will be those who will be influenced, such as the case in the Teluk Kemang election," Dr Mahathir said.

During the Teluk Kemang State by-election on June 10, it was reported that the Opposition used religious issues in their campaign.

Dr Mahathir was also asked to comment on a statement by DAP secretary-general Kerk Kim Hock that the decision to field a Keadilan candidate instead of a previously agreed DAP one was a "stab in the back" to the party.

"From early on, when the Opposition parties decided to work together, each had intentions to cheat the other.

"Pas wants to trick Keadilan and DAP; DAP wants to trick Keadilan and Pas; and Pas wants to trick DAP and Keadilan."

Added Dr Mahathir: "In the end, I see that the party which benefits is Pas, and the biggest loser is Keadilan, having been manipulated."

He said the often-used pictures of Anwar sporting a black eye by the Opposition actually benefited Pas instead of Keadilan.

"Keadilan got nothing but two (parliamentary) seats (in last year's general election)," Dr Mahathir said.

Asked whether the shaky state of the Opposition's supposed coalition would benefit the BN's chances in Lunas, Dr Mahathir said:

"We do not depend on the crisis faced by the Opposition. We depend on our service to society."

Asked on whether the reported problems among the Opposition parties, regarding the selection of candidates for the Lunas by-election, meant that the parties were caught up in racial sentiments, Dr Mahathir said:

"DAP is racist, Keadilan is racist, Pas is also racist."

On the DAP's reported dissatisfaction in not having its candidate fielded in the Lunas by-election, Dr Mahathir said the DAP had to admit that it was trapped in the opposition grouping.

"They saw that they could trick Pas and Keadilan, but in the end, they were the victims."

Added Dr Mahathir: "But this is good, because that's the fate which befalls a party with no principles."

Dr Mahathir was asked whether the Opposition's problems in Lunas was a vindication of the Barisan Nasional's repeated explanation to the rakyat that theirs was a marriage of convenience.

"Yes, it's true, I can always say 'I told you so'. But we are not going to say that," he said.

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