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Election law enforcement (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The Cabinet will discuss ways to better enforce the election laws to ensure supporters of political parties adhere strictly to procedures, particularly those pertaining to campaigning.

This is to ensure they do not go overboard.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the matter would be tabled in the Cabinet and if it is endorsed, the proposal will be submitted to the Election Commission.

"It may be necessary but the important thing is enforcement.

"We will table a report to the Cabinet and if there are good suggestions from the Cabinet, then we will submit them to the Election Commission. If necessary, we will have new laws," he told reporters after chairing the Umno supreme council meeting today.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, said this in reference to the unruly and mischievous behaviour of certain members of the Opposition during the April 1 by-election in Sanggang, Pahang.

The Barisan Nasional won the seat with a majority of 1,963 when its candidate Redzwan Harun polled 6,473 votes against Pas' Datuk Hishamuddin Yahaya who received 4,780 votes.

Dr Mahathir said the Opposition had violated several regulations especially on campaigning.

"The election laws clearly state that campaigning should cease at the stroke of midnight on the eve of polling day.

"But in Sanggang, the Opposition was having a field day ... they were still campaigning way past midnight with flags in their vehicles and so on. It was clear that their intention was to instil fear in the minds of the people," he said.

He said the Opposition supporters had also deliberately caused traffic jams in Chinese and Indian majority areas on polling day to prevent them from voting. This was because they were likely to vote for the BN.

"Due to this, only 25 per cent of them had voted in the morning because they were afraid to go out," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Opposition had also stationed their men, brought in from elsewhere, in Chinese and Indian majority areas. He said there were at least three Pas supporters to every local in these areas.

"It looked like they wanted to disrupt the smooth running of the by-election ... threatened to stage violence so that the people would be afraid to come out to vote," he said, adding the BN had pictures to prove this. Opposition supporters had also blocked entrances at polling centres to prevent the people from voting. He said the police had to be called in to clear the way for the voters to cast their ballots.

"The police actually had to put up barbed wire to make way for the people to get into the polling centres," he said, adding that the Opposition supporters then used other methods to scare the voters such as shouting profanities. Dr Mahathir said there was a need to find ways to ensure better enforcement of the law.

"We still managed to win in Sanggang because this was a by-election ... but the enforcement may have been even more lacking in the general election," he said.

On allegations by Terengganu Menteri Besar Abdul Hadi Awang that the BN had won the Sanggang seat because of money politics, Dr Mahathir said he hoped Abdul Hadi could support his claim.

"They (the Opposition) always blame others. But they were the ones who had 30,000 people brought in from all over and stationed there (in Sanggang).

"I am sure they used more money than allowed under the law. I don't know whether they did it (indulge in money politics) as I do not have proof ... but I hope they can prove that the BN did it," he said.

On whether the BN could have won with a bigger majority if the Opposition had not manipulated the issue of the rude hand gesture made by Pahang Umno chief and Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob, Dr Mahathir said he believed it could.

"Maybe ... just like in the last general election, the Opposition went around showing the picture of (Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's) swollen eye ... as if I did it.

"But he (Adnan) did that because he was provoked. I was told that the Opposition supporters were showing him their private parts. They were doing it even in the presence of women," he said, adding that Adnan would not have responded if he had not been provoked.

Dr Mahathir said it was unfortunate that the BN did not have the pictures to prove that the Opposition supporters had shown their private parts. He said there was probably no party in the world as efficient as Pas when it came to telling lies. He said Pas and its supporters managed to capture Adnan with the rude gesture on camera and then posted it on the Internet.

"I am sure this was planned. They provoked Adnan and then got him in the picture. He would not have done it if he was not provoked," he said.

Asked whether he was happy with the outcome of the by-election, Dr Mahathir said he was. Dr Mahathir said although there were only about 5,000 Umno members in Sanggang, more than 6,000 Malays had voted for the BN. "This time we won in some Malay areas where we had lost in the last general election."

He said despite the Opposition's antics, the people still elected the BN candidate with a bigger majority. This, he said, showed the people were clearly fed up with Pas and rejected its struggle. Dr Mahathir said Umno would also check the status of 900 voters whose names were struck off the electoral roll.

"We want to know whether these people had died or moved," he said, adding that 12 BN voters who voted in the 1999 general election could not do so this time because their names were not in the updated list.

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