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Opposition tactics at poll raises concern

UNDERHAND tactics used by the Opposition, particularly Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS), at the Sanggang state seat poll have raised concerns on needs to further tighten existing election laws.

Umno, which fielded a candidate in the election to represent ruling party Barisan Nasional last weekend, was unhappy with the Opposition's tactic to intimidate voters at the small town in Pahang.

Regardless of the landslide victory that BN managed to register at the Sanggang state seat by-election, the unsportsman conduct by the Opposition was too much and a cause of great concern.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government may have to amend the election laws to ensure that supporters of political parties do not go overboard during election campaigns.

Speaking to reporters in Kuala Lumpur yesterday after chairing the Umno Supreme Council meeting, he said action of PAS supporters in the Sanggang by-election showed that election laws are not respected.

Asked whether the existing legislations on elections may need to be amended to prevent similar incidents from happening in future elections, Dr Mahathir said: "It may be necessary but what is more important is enforcement".

He said Malaysia has already established rules preventing dirty tactics from emerging during an election but the incidents still happen like what occurred in Sanggang.

It was reported that Opposition supporters have contravened the election laws including campaigning exceeding the midnight deadline on the eve of polling day.

Dr Mahathir said the Opposition party supporters had swarmed the Sanggang state constituency, and they were there clearly attempting to make their presence intimidate the voters.

"We found that in Chinese areas, where the likelihood was that they will vote for the BN, they parked their cars causing a traffic jam and gathered in large numbers in the morning, only 25 per cent of the voters dare to go out as they were afraid there may be clashes.

"The same situation was faced by the Indian voters who were also intimidated by the PAS supporters," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the chaos created by the Opposition supporters had made it necessary for the Police to erect barbed wire fencing to provide a passage for voters during the Sanggang state seat by-election.

"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 added.

Asked to comment on the condition of his Japanese counterpart, Keizo Obuchi, who has been reported to be in a coma, Dr Mahathir said he is saddened by the development.

"I am very sad because he is a good friend of Malaysia and had helped us a lot," he added.

News agencies reported that the Japanese Prime Minister is in a coma after suffering a stroke. Obuchi was breathing only with the help of an artificial respirator in an intensive care unit at the Tokyo hospital where he was taken earlier the day before, the acting premier, Mikio Aoki, was reported to have said.

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