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PM: Religious issues the cause

Hardev Kaur in Tokyo

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday he was convinced the use of religious issues by the Opposition had contributed to the lower majority for the Barisan Nasional candidate in the Teluk Kemang by-election.

"I am convinced this had an impact ... We need to study as to why the majority declined," said Dr Mahathir at a Press conference in Tokyo.

The Prime Minister said usually the Opposition candidate in the constituency was either a Chinese or Indian from the DAP and thus religious issues could not be used.

This time, however, it was a candidate from Parti Keadilan Nasional and they used religious issues to woo Muslim voters. Among them was whether they wanted a temple or a mosque. Another issue raised by the Opposition was that of pig rearing in Lukut.

Dr Mahathir said even though the Government had taken extraordinary measures to compensate "almost fully" the pig farmers for their losses during the JE outbreak, the DAP used the issue so that the people would be unhappy with the Government.

BN candidate S. Sothinathan won the by-election with a majority of 5,972 when he obtained 24,500 votes while Parti Keadilan Nasional's Ruslan Kasim managed 18,528 votes.

In the Nov 29 general election, BN's S.A. Anpalagan won with a 9,942-vote majority. He garnered 27,112 votes to defeat Keadilan's N. Gobalakrishnan, contesting on a DAP ticket, who obtained 17,170.

The by-election was held following the death of Anpalagan on April 28.

Asked on racial politics, Dr Mahathir said it was certainly not healthy, adding that the opposition would not hesitate to use such issues if they wanted co-operation from the other parties.

Asked about Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik's decision to withdraw his resignation, Dr Mahathir said the Government was "very happy".

"He may have some personal problems and whatever people may say about him, Ling's commitment to the Government is 100 per cent," Dr Mahathir said, adding that Ling had obviously accepted his advice not to resign.

Dr Ling, who is also MCA president, had announced on May 22 that he was resigning as Transport Minister but reversed that decision on his return from a two-week holiday last week.

Dr Mahathir said: "I feel the work done by him is very good."

Dr Mahathir, who was on a five-day visit to Japan, returns to Kuala Lumpur today.

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