

PM EXPLAINS

● The Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 1983, has not yet received Royal assent because the Rulers do not agree with several sections of the amendments contained in the Bill.

Because the Rulers did not agree that the Yang di-Pertuan Agong could give his assent to the amendments, the efforts of Parliament up to then were hampered.

— Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the Dewan Rakyat yesterday.

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad made a 10-minute Ministerial statement in the Dewan Rakyat today on the Constitution amendments issue.

In a carefully-worded statement, the Prime Minister implied that:

● It was not the Yang di-Pertuan Agong who was withholding assent to the Bill, passed by Parliament in August, but that the King could not give his assent without his brother Rulers agreeing;

● The Rulers had disagreed with the explanations of the Government he had presented to the Conference of Rulers in Kota Kinabalu in October;

● They had maintained their stand in the meeting between them and a five-member Umno delegation at the Istana Bukit Kayangan in Shah Alam on Nov. 20 when the Umno delegation had made several proposals to solve the issue without affecting the dignity (*maruah*) of any quarter; and

● The conciliatory statement released by the Rulers after the Nov. 20 Shah Alam meeting was at the request of Umno.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir stressed that although the Government was disappointed that its efforts to solve the issue had failed so far, it was continuing to try and seek a solution.

He also mentioned that except for the Constitution amendments Bill, the other seven Bills passed by Parliament during the session which ended in August had received Royal assent.

(It is understood that the Timbalan Yang di-Pertuan Agong gave his assent to the Bills last Friday.

This is being seen as a positive development by the Government and appears to have allayed fears that the 1984 Budget passed by the Dewan Rakyat would not receive Royal assent).

The Prime Minister did

ment up to then were hampered," Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said.

This was the first time the Prime Minister has implied that it was not the Yang di-Pertuan Agong who was holding up the Bills, as mentioned in several reports in foreign newspapers and magazines.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said that he, as the Prime Minister, had explained the rationale for the amendments to the Rulers at the Conference of Rulers in Kota Kinabalu on Oct. 13 and appealed to them to give their consent to the King to assent to the Bill.

He added that his explanations and appeal, however, were rejected by the Rulers.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, said that he then sought the good offices of the Umno Supreme Council to find a formula to solve the issue and that "through this Umno channel, we offered several proposals which did not tarnish the dignity of any quarter."

He said that the Rulers, however, did not agree with the proposals.

The Prime Minister said the new proposals consisted of changes to the original amendments and it was thought that they could overcome the concern of the Rulers.

He did not elaborate on the proposals but reports say that they consisted of:

● Extending the number of days from 15 in the original amendments to Article 66(5) to 30 for Bills to become law even if the King has not yet given his assent;

● Substituting the word "Cabinet" for "Prime Minister" in the original amendment to Article 150; and

● Withdrawing the amendment to the Eighth Schedule which affects the States.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said: "The Government felt disappointed at the failure of this effort."

He added that to calm the fears of the people, the Umno delegation requested the Rulers to make a statement and it was this statement which was later released in the name of the

Rulers.

"I have reported these developments to the Cabinet. In this context, the Cabinet felt that these matters be reported to Parliament," he said.

The Prime Minister reiterated that the Government's intention in amending the Constitution was to smoothen the administration of the country "so that there will not arise any misunderstanding over the provisions of the Constitution."

He added: "With these amendments, the system of Parliamentary democracy and Constitutional monarchy will become more clear and specific."

"But I regret that there are certain irresponsible quarters who have taken this opportunity to twist the issue and confuse the people."