

GOVT DID NOT BACK DOWN. SAYS DR M

STAR 12 DEC 1999

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Thursday, four months after it was passed by Parliament.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad dismissed allegations that the Government and Umno had given in too much to the Rulers and had backed down in resolving the Constitution amendments issue.

The Prime Minister and Umno president said the issue was solved "a la Malay" through compromise.

"In a negotiation, it is not just one side which gives out suggestions but both sides. The suggestions given may be accepted or rejected.

"The solution of the issue was through a compromise formula involving both sides," he told reporters after chairing a special Umno Supreme Council meeting at party headquarters today.

He reiterated that the compromise formula did not jeopardise the principle of parliamentary supremacy in a system of parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy.

"As I have said before, that principle is not up for negotiation," he said.

Asked whether it was true that he had rejected certain conditions which the Rulers imposed before the Bill could be given Royal assent, he replied: "Since it has been given assent, that does not come up. I leave it to you to guess (what the conditions were)."

There has been speculation that the Rulers wanted a written undertaking from the Prime Minister that future administrations would not bring up the matter of Article 150 and the Eighth Schedule.

It is believed that this condition was told to the Prime Minister in his meeting with the Raja Muda of Perak, Raja Tun Azlan Shah, on Tuesday.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir reportedly told Raja Tun Azlan that he could not give such a written undertaking as he could not tie the hands of future Prime Ministers.

He is believed to have pointed out that he had given his word that the amendments to Article 150 and the Eighth Schedule would be repealed in a special session of Parliament.

The Constitution (Amendment) Bill was given Royal assent by the Timbalan Yang di-Pertuan Agong on

Thursday, four months after it was passed by Parliament. He said Article 40(1) stated that the King acts on the advice of the Cabinet or any Minister given the responsibility by the Cabinet.

Asked to comment on the statement by the Sultan of Kelantan that he regretted that the Bill had been signed, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said: "This is not a question of being happy or not. It is a question of legalities."

Asked if there were in the Supreme Council any of the "traitors and opportunists" he had said obstructed efforts to find a solution, he replied: "As far as I can see, they have all given their support."

Confirming reports about the changes to the amended Article 66(5), the Prime Minister said essentially the difference would be that instead of the 15-day time limit contained in the amendment, the deadline would now be extended to 30 days.

He said that if Royal assent was withheld, it would be deemed to have been given after that time. The new Bill would also contain a provision allowing the King to register his disapproval of any Bill, after which it would be sent back to Parliament for further debate and if passed, again presented for Royal assent.

If assent is again withheld, the Bill would become law after 30 days with assent being deemed to have been given.

The Prime Minister said: "If the Dewan Rakyat feels that its original decision was correct, then within 60 days (30 days after presented for assent and another 30 days to again present the Bill for Royal assent) the Bill will become law."

"On the other hand, I feel it will be a good thing for the Dewan Rakyat to also consider the views of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong should he present his views or objections," he added.

On the repealing of Article 150, which deals with the power to declare an Emergency, the Prime Minister said that according to the Government's legal advisors, there were other provisions in the Constitution that said that the King had to act on the advice of the Cabinet.