

Mahathir on right to make comments

NSJ 1304

KUALA LUMPUR. Mon. — People have the right to pass remarks against the Rulers and the Government if it is to show that a Ruler has been misled or mistaken in any of his measures and if it is to point out errors or defects in any Government or Constitution.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today, quoting the Sedition Act, 1948. He said whatever remarks or comments that were legitimate for the Rulers were also legitimate for the Government and vice-versa.

The Prime Minister

said that while it was seditious to bring hatred or contempt or to excite disaffection against any Ruler or Government, the Sedition Act, also made exceptions.

Clarify

Under Section 3 (2) of the Act, an act or a speech is not seditious if it is:

- To show that any Ruler has been misled or mistaken in any of his measures.
- To point out errors or defects in any Government or Constitution... with a view to the remedying errors or defects.
- To persuade the subjects of any Ruler or the inhabitants of any terri-

tory governed by any Government to attempt to procure by lawful means the alteration of any matter in the territory...

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir made this clarification when he said it would be unavoidable for Members of Parliament to make comments on any matter made by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong: "It does not mean that giving reasons for his objection to a Bill that has been presented to him for assent.

"According to our custom and tradition, MPs and State Assemblymen have never involved the King or the Rulers in any debate or speech.

"But this is allowed by

the Sedition Act in the provisions on exceptions," said the Prime Minister in presenting the Bill to amend the Constitution.

However, he advised the MPs to be cautious in their criticisms because the Rulers would not participate in the debate and the Government would be responsible to refute all comments and if needed, to take legal action.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir also said that although no legal proceedings can be instituted against a Ruler, this did mean that a Ruler: Members of Parliament was free to commit any crime, torture anyone, seize property, or judgment made by their debts.

"It does not mean that any act that is viewed as wrong by the ordinary rakyat is not wrong for the Ruler."

He was commenting on a letter to him by the MP and State Assemblyman for Jelutong, Karpal Singh, who had asked what protection a citizen had against assault by a Ruler.