

# 'IT'S OVER, SO LET'S NOT TALK ABOUT IT ANYMORE'

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad replied to criticisms hurled at him in connection with last year's amendments to the country's Constitution, especially by those who felt that the amendments should have been referred to Umno first.

He asked why they (the critics) did not refer to Umno before making public announcements and joining outsiders to obstruct the actions taken by party leaders.

"Have those who are not elected more rights than those in office? If this is so, what is the position of democracy in the party?"

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said he had, in the past, been sacked from the party "for making mistakes" (going against the leadership after the May 13, 1969, incident).

"Today, I lead the party but we do not sack those who commit errors against the party. Who is more democratic and who is a yes-man?"

He said the matter of the constitutional amendments was not as big an issue as the separation of Singapore in 1965 and did not go against the Constitution; furthermore, it did not need the consent of the Rulers.

He said the separation of any region from Malaysia was prohibited by the Constitution.

It needed the approval of the Conference of Rulers and the party would surely have been informed, if not given the chance to debate it, he added.

"But as we know, there was no reference made and no discussions. The Umno secretary-general then (the late Tan Sri Syed Jaafar Albar) re-

signed in protest against the way the decision on the separation was made.

"Nevertheless, the amendments were made with two-thirds of the Members of Parliament, including myself, supporting it," he said.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said he gave his support because the ends were more important than the means.

"There is no use in having leaders if they are not allowed to use their discretion, particularly when public debate would create more problems and tension."

He was grateful that the constitutional amendments issue was already by history.

"We have achieved our objective and should be thankful not only because of the attainment of the objective but also because the party is still united, albeit with slight cracks," he said.

He added that cracks could easily become splits and the strong could become weak if struck often.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said now that the issue had been resolved, the question of whether "the leadership was too compromising or too powerful" need not be debated.

"Umno leaders will come and go but the party's struggle must be maintained

"We have determined that in the end, it is the people who have the right to make the laws which affect them," he added.

He thanked party leaders and members who had supported the Go-

vernment in this matter.

He was happy that the information briefings held had been well attended by Malays and non-Malays.

Thus, no one could say that the amendments were made without the agreement of the majority of Umno members, he added.

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