

PM: We can consider MCA's demands but...

Don't blackmail the Government

By Sabry Sharif and Ho Kay Tat

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he would not allow the eight Selangor MCA State Assemblymen to blackmail the State Government into amending the Administration of Islamic Law Enactment 1989.

The Prime Minister said the eight could go ahead and resign but they "cannot blackmail the Government" to accept their demands.

"We cannot accept threats. We can consider their demands but it must not be done by blackmailing the Government," he said at Parliament House this evening.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Barisan National chairman, was commenting on the threat by the eight Assemblymen that they would quit their seats if the Selangor State Assembly failed to amend the Enactment at its sitting beginning Saturday.

The eight Assemblymen submitted their conditional resignation letters effective Dec 15 to the Speaker two days ago.

They are Datuk Yap Pian Hon (Serdang), Datuk Ng Thian Hock (Pandanaran), Mr Tang See Hang (Rawang),

Mr Ng Soon Por (Sungai Pelek), Mr Eng Hoi Choo (Telok Panglima Garang), Mr Wong Ah Taih (Kuala Kubu Baru), Mr Tong Yoke Seng (Telok Gadong) and Mr Sim Keng Seik (Sekinchan).

The Enactment stipulates that anyone who has reached the age of maturity according to the Islamic Syariah can convert to Islam. Minors are also automatically converted if their parents embrace Islam under the Enactment.

The Enactment was passed by the Assembly last July with full support of the eight who were later chastised by the party for supporting the law.

Asked whether the Government would

□ MATTER COULD HAVE BEEN RESOLVED, SAYS MB: P2

allow by-elections to take place over this issue, Dr Mahathir said: "If they want to resign, what can we do."

He said he was surprised by the quit threat and added: "I was informed of the move by the MCA leadership today."

On whether the MCA had told him what the party planned to do to solve this problem, the Prime Minister would only say that this question be best answered by the leadership.

To a question on what would be the best way to settle this problem, Dr Mahathir said that it was up to the MCA and the Assemblymen to think about it.

Responding to his statement on Aug 17 which quoted him as saying that the is-

sue would be resolved in the Barisan spirit, he said:

"I had believed earlier that this problem could be solved in the Barisan spirit. But it seems that there are people who do not have the Barisan spirit."

Earlier today, Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Haji Muhammad Tajb said no amendments would be proposed at the Assembly's sitting.

"I cannot accept their action and I will not bow to threats," he said.

"The State Government has never bowed to threats and force. Their action is unprecedented," he added.

Meanwhile, the MCA central committee chaired by president Datuk Dr Ling Liong Sik held a three-hour meeting on the issue at Wisma MCA.

Datuk Seri Dr Ling later issued a three-paragraph statement which reads:

"The MCA Central Committee discussed the issue of the Selangor Administration of Islamic Law Enactment 1989. The MCA's position is based upon the firm premise that parents have the right to determine the religion of their children who are below the age of 18.

"The MCA Central Committee was today briefed by the Selangor State Assemblymen over this issue. The MCA Central Committee appreciates all the steps they have taken to resolve the issue.

"The MCA Central Committee resolves to continue to find ways and means to resolve the issue amicably as soon as possible."