

Dr M: Withdraw quit letters first

BY SABRY SHARIF

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Selangor Government will not resolve the Islamic Administration Law Enactment 1989 controversy until the eight MCA State assemblymen withdraw their conditional resignation letters.

Speaking to reporters today after chairing a 3½-hour Umno supreme council meeting at the Putra World Trade Centre, the Prime Minister blamed the Assemblymen's negligence for causing this controversy. He did not elaborate

Dr Mahathir who is Umno president said the supreme council backed Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Haji Muhammad Taib's stand on the controversy.

Tan Sri Muhammad had said on Thursday that the matter should be settled in the Barisan Nasional spirit and not through ultimatums

The eight had submitted conditional resignation letters to the State Assembly Speaker on Monday, threatening to quit from Dec 15 if the disputed section of the enactment was not amended at the current Assembly sitting.

The provision under question stipulates that anyone who has reached the age of puberty according to Islamic law can convert to Islam. Islamic Syariah law accepts 15 years as the puberty

age for boys while for girls it is when they first menstruate.

Dr Mahathir said Umno was prepared to study ways of settling this problem but "we cannot accept ultimatums".

He said throwing ultimatums was not the way problems in the country were solved, adding it was Malaysian style to have a "give-and-take attitude" and to let "common sense prevail" when dealing with difficult situations.

"But now it appears, there are certain quarters who do not care about peace and stability and are trying to take action to force us to do something."

He regretted the Assemblymen's actions which he described as "unBarisan-like and without consideration for peace and stability".

Dr Mahathir said the MCA should have discussed the quit threat at the Barisan Nasional level, "or at the very least, I should have been informed before they took this move".

He said he had at first thought the Assemblymen's quit threat were their own individual actions. "But now it appears these moves have been planned by certain quarters."

He added efforts to settle this problem would now be difficult because the issue was now publicised.

Earlier, Tan Sri Muhammad who is also a supreme council member, was invited by Dr Ma-

hathir to explain the sequence of events leading to the controversy.

The Menteri Besar said in view of this quit threat, the State Government considered that whatever efforts that had been taken so far to resolve this controversy had been abandoned by the MCA.

Consequently, he had directed the State Legal Adviser to suspend the review of the disputed section of the enactment, he said.

He added that the State Government had decided not to resume talks with the MCA until the ultimatum by the eight had been withdrawn.

He said he was prepared for by-elections if the Assemblymen did not want to comply with this condition for resuming talks.

Later this evening, Bernama reported Tan Sri Muhammad as saying that all the eight assemblymen who wanted to resign their seats could do so now.

"If they want to resign, do not wait till Dec 15. They can do it today," he said at a gathering of Islamic associations at his residence at Bukit Megawati in Shah Alam.

He said the State Government would not back down and would not amend the Selangor Islamic Law Enactment 1989 despite the demands and threats of the eight assemblymen.

Tan Sri Muhammad said the State Government was neither stubborn nor arrogant but was stern on the matter.