

PM: S&ah can't hold referendum

By Farush Khan

SUBANG, Tues. — The Sabah Government cannot hold a referendum on its own for the review of the 20-point Inter-Government Committee Agreement (IGCA), Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today. The Prime Minister said if Sabah still insisted on doing so, the federal government would have to study the provision under the Constitution first.

"But this (holding a referendum individually) is not appropriate. If all states decide to hold referendums, there will be disunity like what is happening in Yugoslavia," he said.

He was responding to questions by reporters on the call by Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan that there should be a referendum for the review of the IGCA.

"He (Pairin) always raised issues which could cause disunity among Malaysians," he told reporters at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport before leaving for Hong Kong to attend

the Europe/East Asia Economic Forum and to address the Foreign Correspondents Club there.

He said there was no such thing as having a referendum to get the people's response on the review of the IGCA the basis by which Sabah and Sarawak joined the Federation of Malaysia.

"If there is, then it should be held throughout the country.

"Maybe there are people who do not want Sabah to join Malaysia. We must give the right to others too."

On whether an election could also be considered as a referendum, Dr Mahathir said that they are two different things.

Dr Mahathir had said that the special privileges accorded to Sabah and Sarawak under the 1963 agreement would be reviewed to bring about greater integration of Malaysia.

(Last Sunday Pair-in stated in Kota Kinabalu that he would support a review of the IGCA provided it was carried out in the form of a referendum.

(When asked how and

when the referendum should be held, Pairin stated that going back to the people in an election would be one form of referendum,

(Hamid had stated yesterday that the country's federal Constitution did not provide for the holding of referendums and those with grievances should refer them to Parliament or go through elections.)

Dr Mahathir, accompanied by his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, and Foreign Ministry deputy secretary-general Datuk Renji Sattiah, is also scheduled to leave from Hong Kong for Japan on Thursday for a one-week unofficial visit.

Those who saw him off at the airport included Agriculture Minister Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid, Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat, Law Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar and Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ling Liong Sik.

Dr Mahathir said while in Hong Kong, he would speak on regional grouping at the forum, held under the auspices of the Geneva-based

World Economic Forum.

In Japan, he will visit two or three industrial projects and meet Japanese businessmen and traders, arranged by Japan's Institute of Strategic and Economic Studies.

"The meeting will give me the opportunity to speak on Malaysia, its relationship with Japan, regional co-operation and other relevant matters, he said.

He will also meet his Japanese counterpart, Kichi Miyazawa and former Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone during which he might touch on matters of common interest, including the proposed creation of the East Asia Economic Caucus to promote freer world trade.

On the deterioration of proficiency in the English language among local economic graduates expressed by several lecturers, Dr Mahathir said this was true.

"That is why we are giving emphasis to serious learning of English," he said.

By learning English, he said, it did not mean that

the national language was being neglected and forgotten.

"We will continue to learn our own language, but whether we like it or not, English is important in the commercial world now.

"Probably when it becomes unimportant one day, we don't have to learn it."

Several lecturers at yesterday's "Nasional Seminar on Economics Programmes in Universities: An Evaluation" in Petaling Jaya, mentioned the lack of proficiency in English among economics graduates.

Dr Mahathir also said the government had recruited more trained English teachers to improve the standard of the language of the students and would continue to instil greater interest among the people to learn the language.

"It is not that difficult to learn English. What is important is that we must read a lot of English books and speak more of the language."

□ PICTURE ON PAGE 5