

PM: Attitude towards rulers may change

By ZULKIFLITALIB

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad fears that any further incident involving the royalty will change the people's attitude towards the rulers.

He was commenting on the credibility of the rulers following two incidents of alleged assault involving the royalty.

"I am worried if this (the assaults) is repeated, it will affect the people's thinking and the image of rulers," he said.

To emphasise his point, Dr Mahathir cited the problems faced by the monarchy in Britain.

"Britons who were respectful of the monarchy are now having a different view because of certain issues," he said after

opening the 14th International Federation of Non-Governmental Organisation conference on the Prevention of Drug and Substance Abuse at a hotel here.

In the first incident last July, the Malaysian Hockey Association found the Tengku Bendahara of Johor guilty of assaulting a Perak player.

Last week, the coach of the Sultan Abu Bakar College hockey team, Mr Douglas Goetz, reportedly sought medical treatment after being summoned to Istana Bukit Serene in Johor Baru.

The alleged assault on Gomez, who has since lodged a police report, came after he criticised the Johor Hockey Association over the forced withdrawal of the college

team from a national schools tournament.

Asked whether the Federal Constitution would be amended to bring rulers under the purview of the law, he said:

"The meaning of 'above the law' has many interpretations.

"It does not extend to beating and murder. Rulers are above the law only in respect to normal matters such as debts," he said, adding that the alleged assault on Gomez could not be considered a normal matter.

Asked whether this meant legal action could be taken, Dr Mahathir said the Government was still studying the case.

On procedures in the appointment of rulers, Dr Mahathir said certain states already had sys-

tems, which should be upheld by all.

"However, during the British rule there were cases where a crown prince was replaced for unbecoming conduct.

"The conduct and behaviour of an heir must be appropriate to his role and subsequent appointment as future ruler."

"If we find that an heir to a throne is no longer qualified, we will have to consider if he should be appointed or not.

"If he likes to go around beating up people and so on, we will have to consider whether he is qualified to be a ruler."

Dr Mahathir also agreed with a statement made by the then Lord President in 1981 that rulers must protect their credibility if they did not

wish to be consigned to museums.

"The rulers should heed the advice of the then Lord President," he said.

In Penang, the DAP commended Dr Mahathir on the Government's stand that members of the royalty were not above the law and could not "kill or beat anyone."

Parliamentary opposition leader and DAP secretary-general Lim Kit Siang said in a statement it was the responsibility of the Government to protect those who had been wronged.

He added that the DAP would support the Government in upholding the principle that no one was above the law so Malaysians could go about their legitimate pursuits and livelihood without fear.