

Umno supreme council wants end to immunity

By Azmi M. Anshar and Vijayan Menon

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. — Umno is prepared to face any obstacles that may be put up against its decision to propose constitutional amendments that will end the immunity enjoyed by the Rulers.

The party decided at an emergency meeting of its supreme council here tonight that the immunity against prosecution enjoyed by the Rulers under the Constitution should be terminated.

Umno president, **Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad**, speaking to the Press after chairing the 2½-hour meeting, said the supreme council was moved to take this action as the assault on Douglas Gomez (by the Sultan of Johor) was not an isolated incident.

He said there had been worst cases, including those that led to deaths, in the past.

Moreover, said the Prime Minister, the people of Johor had been living in fear of the Johor royal household due to the many unreported cases.

"This is an unhealthy Situation which should not

happen in a democratic country like Malaysia where the rights of the people are guaranteed and protected," he said.

Dr Mahathir said when provisions were made in the Constitution giving the immunity, the lawmakers did not anticipate that this privilege would be abused to commit offences including murder torture and assault.

He said what the lawmakers had in mind was to lend respect to the Rulers by giving them a position higher than the common people.

He said the Umno decision would be tabled for adoption at Saturday's Barisan Nasional supreme council meeting before it is brought to the Cabinet.

"We realise that there may be certain obstacles, but we will make an effort to achieve the people's wish so that they be protected by the law from any crimes perpetrated against them," he added.

Asked whether the proposed move required the approval of the Rulers' Council, Dr Mahathir said it would.

On whether the move would be opposed by the Rulers, Dr Mahathir said they may disagree but "we will find ways to achieve

our objective. We will try to persuade them."

Asked if action could be taken against the Johor Ruler without the Constitution being amended, Dr Mahathir said it looked difficult because there are many legal interpretations on the matter.

But action could be taken against other members of the royalty, including those who abetted the alleged crimes.

For instance, if there is a case against Tunku Abdul Majid Idris (son of the Sultan of Johor who allegedly assaulted a Perak hockey team goalkeeper), the Government would prosecute him.

Dr Mahathir said he believed there were Rulers who would not condone such crimes.

When asked if the Government would act this time around, he said this depended on the people.

"Sometimes when we take action and there is no support from the people, then we become weak. But this time we see that this is the wish of the people and it is the first instance that the opposition parties are sup-

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BN leaders may tour country

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porting the action," he said.

Dr Mahathir said since the issue had been discussed openly in the Dewan Rakyat, no MPs would be spared, including Barisan backbenchers, if there were to be official action against them for speaking out against the Ruler.

He also said if necessary, he and other Barisan lead-

ers would tour the country like they did during the 1983 constitutional crisis to explain the matter to the people.

On the fate of Gomez, Dr Mahathir said the Government would continue protecting the hockey coach as long as it felt that he was still in danger.

He reiterated his earlier pledge that other victims of the Sultan of Johor who are

encouraged to come forward would be protected.

Asked whether an Umno delegation would be sent to meet the Rulers, Dr Mahathir said there was no need for it for the time being but one would be sent when there is no support from the Rulers.

He said he did not think that this would lead to a constitutional crisis like in 1933.