

Removing Rulers' immunity from criminal

Amendment in a

charges
month

By Jeffrey Ramayah and Manan Osman

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — A special session of Parliament will be called in a month's time to enable the Government to seek the removal of immunity given to the Rulers against criminal proceedings.

The Government will also consider disbanding the Johor Military Force as there is evidence of abuse of powers and wrongdoing by members of the force.

Announcing this after chairing the emergency meeting of the Barisan Nasional supreme council here today, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the constitutional amendments are purely to remove the immunity of the Rulers against legal proceedings in criminal cases.

The Barisan Nasional supreme council had earlier adopted the proposal made by Umno to effect the amendments. Last night, the Umno supreme council adopted a resolution urging the Government to amend the Constitution.

Asked what will happen to the amendments if they are not given royal assent, Dr Mahathir, who is also Barisan Nasional chairman and Umno president, said:

"There is a provision in the Constitution that states if the Rulers do not give their consent to amendments approved by both the Dewan Rakyat and Dewan Negara, the amendments automatically become law."

All top officials of the component Barisan Nasional parties attended the one-hour meeting at the Umno headquarters here.

He said the special emergency meeting today discussed the alleged assault of Maktab Sultan Abu Bakar hockey coach Douglas Gomez by the Sultan of Johor. It viewed the incident as being very serious.

"The Barisan Nasional unambiguously supports the system of constitutional monarchy practised in the country. However, we disagree with the provision to grant immunity to Rulers for any offence they commit and we again unambiguously agree that this special provision be removed from the

Constitution," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Barisan Nasional decided to call for a special session of the Dewan Rakyat and the Dewan Negara in a month's time so that the amendments could be tabled.

He said the Dewan Rakyat unanimously adopted a motion last Thursday to remove a provision prohibiting Members of Parliament from discussing the behaviour of Rulers.

"The people have called on the Government to amend the Constitution to remove the immunity granted to Sultans so that they can be charged in the courts if they commit a criminal offence

"Even all opposition parties have supported the Government's move and therefore the Rulers are expected to respect the wishes of the people," he said.

On the Johor Military Force, Dr Mahathir said it was established by the British before independence purely to perform ceremonial

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al duties "but now we have information that it is being used for other purposes as well," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he will be meeting Johor Umno members on Tuesday when he attends a function organised by the Malay Chamber of Commerce and Industry Malaysia, Johor branch.

Later, Deputy Prime Minister Ghafar Baba told reporters the Government will also have to consider the functions and scope of the respective State Pardons Boards to ensure there is no abuse.

Asked whether there were cases other than the Gomez case, Ghafar said even if there were, the government could not take action since no reports had been lodged.

"The people must inform us if there has been abuse of power by anyone. Nobody is above the law," Ghafar said.

DEC 1997