

PM:-All should know

By Anand G. 1992
and K.P. Waran

JOHOR BARU, Wed. — The proposed move to abolish the immunity granted to the Rulers would not mean that there is less respect for the monarchy — Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister said it was important for everyone to know and understand the rationale behind the intention because it was not aimed at turning the people against the institution of constitutional monarchy.

Instead, the proposed move is intended to ensure fairness for everyone and eliminate the possibility of abuse of power on the people through various irresponsible acts or behaviour.

Explaining the rationale behind the move, Dr Mahathir said there was a

strong moral sense to remove the immunity because the country believed in the basic principle that everyone was subject to the rule of law.

Even in Islam, there is no mention that certain people were above the law, Dr Mahathir said. He said the country wants the system of constitutional monarchy, but that this must be beneficial to the people.

Dr Mahathir said this when he addressed a gathering of Johor Umno divisional and branch leaders at Saujana, the official residence of Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin here.

Dr Mahathir, as Umno president, had earlier chaired a closed-door meeting of the Johor Umno liaison committee which lasted over an hour at Saujana. He is also here to attend a dinner given by the Johor

Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

A large group of newsmen, including the foreign Press, was present to cover the meeting.

Dr Mahathir drew several references to historical facts when explaining the situation.

He said the immunity for the Rulers was incorporated into the Constitution because everyone was confident in the belief that the Rulers would not break the law.

He said Umno had never intended to abolish the system of constitutional monarchy, only the cloak of invincibility brought about by the immunity granted to the Rulers.

He said some quarters had suggested that since the issue concerned only Johor, any proposed move on the matter should only be con-

rationale behind move

finer to the state. On this, Dr Mahathir responded that this should not be so, and that it should cover all states.

Later, at a Press conference, Dr Mahathir said he was confident of getting the support and endorsement of the Rulers for the proposed move, citing that there were already statements in the Press from certain Rulers expressing their support on the matter.

Asked when support from the Rulers on the proposed move would be sought — before or after next month's special sitting of Parliament — Dr Mahathir said this has not been decided.

He said some people preferred that this should be done before the sitting while others thought that it would be better after Parliament has sat. In any case, this will be considered fur-

ther in due time, he said.

Asked to comment on the Sultan of Johor's reaction to the proposed move, Dr Mahathir said the Ruler has not rejected it, merely saying that he would study it further.

He said the reaction could be described as "positive" because the Sultan has not rejected it.

The fact that he wanted to study it further was only natural, Dr Mahathir said.

Muhyiddin met the Sultan earlier today to explain to him the developments surrounding the proposed move.

Asked why the Government had decided to pursue the proposed move only now, the Prime Minister said things were different now.

He said the people seemed to accept the immunity but remarked that "times have

changed". Nevertheless, the Rulers can still be Heads of State even when the immunity is removed.

He likened recent incidents, especially the "hockey incident" to the straw that broke the camel's back. The people's sentiments regarding this was one of resentment, he added.

Asked how comprehensive the proposed change would be, and whether it would include matters pertaining to rules affecting ascension to a particular Ruler's throne, the Prime Minister said this has not been decided yet.

Earlier, when speaking to reporters at the RMAF airport in Sungei Besi, Kuala Lumpur, Dr Mahathir said the Cabinet today decided to make a request for a special meeting of the Dewan Rakyat on Jan 18 and 19, and the Dewan Negara on Jan au

to debate the amendments to the Federal Constitution to withdraw the immunity enjoyed by Rulers.

He said Law Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar would serve notice immediately to Dewan Rakyat Speaker Tan Sri Mohamed Zahir Ismail to hold the special meeting and to table the amendments.

The Standing Orders require that a 28-day notice be given to call for the special sitting.

Responding to questions, Dr Mahathir said the nature of the amendments was not discussed by the Cabinet, and added that no decision was taken as to whether any other legislation would be amended during the special parliamentary meeting.

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