

UMNO TO SEEK ROYAL CONSENT

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JOHOR BARU: Umno will seek the consent of all the Rulers for the proposed amendments to the Constitution to remove their immunity from the law, ~~Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad~~ said yesterday.

The Prime Minister said no decision had been made on how this **would** be done (whether seeking audience with the Rulers from state to state or through a Rulers Conference) or if the royal consent should be sought after or before the amendments were tabled in Parliament.

"There is one view that the Rulers' consent should be sought through a Rulers Conference before the proposed amendments are tabled while others feel that we should go through with the amendments in Parliament first," he told newsmen after meeting Umno leaders.

"We will study all the views and see which is right."

Earlier in Kuala Lumpur, Dr Mahathir said the Cabinet decided yesterday to seek a special sitting of Parliament from Jan 18-20 to discuss the amendments.

He said the **Dewan Rakyat** would sit on Jan 18 and 19 and the **Dewan Negara** on Jan 20.

Law Minister Datuk Syed **Hamid Albar** had been instructed to immediately submit notices to both Houses in accordance with the regulation requiring Parliament to be given 28 days' notice of any special sitting, he added.

The Umno president, who is on a day's visit to the state, held a closed-door meeting with the state Umno liaison committee.

Dr Mahathir said the Sultan of Selangor had openly supported the proposed amendments and other Rulers had also indirectly indicated their support.

"But at this point, I do not know if the majority of the Rulers are in support or are against it. For now, the Government has no intention to make the amendments retrospective," he said.

On the Sultan of Johor's stand that he would study the proposed amendments, Dr Mahathir said he perceived the Sultan's reply as a positive one.

The Sultan, he said, had not rejected the proposal but had agreed to **look** at it.

Earlier, in his speech, Dr Mahathir said there were views that since the problem of assault on citizens by royalty was reported only in Johor, **recti-**

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fication should be made to contain the problem in Johor alone.

"But how can we accept **such** laws in our system? The proposed amendments will have to cover all Rulers. If the Rulers have no intention to abuse their powers, they have nothing to worry about," he said.

"In no other country do Rulers enjoy **powers** like in **Malaysia**. We are not asking for much. All we are saying is that the Rulers should not have immunity to assault people.

"It is also against Islam to accord immunity to Rulers. The Rulers must accept changes with the times as we have seen in England, where Queen Elizabeth volunteered to pay taxes," he added.

Dr Mahathir said he should have taken effective **steps to check abuses** of the immunity accorded by the Constitution to Rulers earlier when there were reports of citizens being assaulted and harassed.

"I admit that here I was wrong.- This was a mistake on my **part**. When those who **are** given the authority (by the people) do not take action to correct such wrongs, their subordinates will follow their examples.

"But we must act now to rectify the situation to protect the people. If something is wrong, we have to say so. If I am going to be scolded for this, I will accept. Or else, what is the point of being Prime Minister?"