

Dr M: Amendment does not mean

Semangat 46 'is

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end of the monarchy
'confused'

By Balbeer S. Jessy

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Semangat 46 and its President, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, are confused over the proposal to remove the Rulers' immunity from the Constitution.

He said the Government wanted to retain the monarchy, and not remove it. He said he failed to see how Tengku Razaleigh and his party could object to the proposal.

"I cannot understand their objection . . . it appears as though they are confused between the proposal to remove the immunity, from prosecution and the removal of the institution itself."

Dr Mahathir said the two were unrelated. In countries where monarchy was still preserved, the Rulers did not have immunity and yet they were respected and held in high esteem, he said.

Dr Mahathir said this to reporters after presenting prizes to winners of the Premier Equestrian Championship at the Bukit Kiara Equestrian and Country Resort here today.

The championship is the first international competition among Asean countries held in honour of Dr Mahathir for his strong support for the sport and the formation of the Malaysian Equine Council.

Semangat 46 and Tengku Razaleigh have objected to any attempt to strip the Rulers of their immunity by amending the Federal Constitution.

Tengku Razaleigh was reported to have argued that if Rulers were stripped of their immunity, it would not be difficult to remove them from their position in future.

Dr Mahathir said: "We have said this before . . . we still want to preserve the institution of the Rulers."

But in this modern world, the people could not accept the fact that certain people were granted immunity Yom prosecution while the majority were not, he said.

Dr Mahathir said it was untrue that the Rulers would lose their supremacy and sovereignty once the immunity was removed as

claimed by certain people.

"This is not true . . . that is their conception. Does it mean that only by assaulting or killing people can they be considered Rulers?" Dr Mahathir asked.

He reiterated that the position of the Rulers would not be threatened even if their immunity was removed.

Dr Mahathir was also asked to comment on the diverging positions held by component parties of the Gagasan Rakyat coalition on the immunity issue.

"I feel that the people generally support the move to amend the Constitution."

"If there is any party that does not support the wishes of the people, I believe the people will question their stand."

Tengku Razaleigh and Semangat 46 are the only ones objecting to the proposed amendment. On Dec 10, all political parties, including the Opposition, voted in the Dewan Rakyat in support of a substantive motion on the controversy.

Responding to a question that Tengku Razaleigh and Semangat 46 leaders intended to hold ceramahs throughout the country and explain the party's stand, Dr Mahathir said they were free to do so.

"If they flout the law by inciting restlessness and causing disturbance, action will be taken . . . but if they want to meet their members and the people, that is their problem."

The stand had put Semangat 46 at loggerheads with its main allies, Pas and DAP. The DAP had openly criticised him when its deputy chairman, Mr Karpal Singh, said Tengku Razaleigh should "detach himself and consider this issue objectively".

Pas and the Sultan of Kelantan had on Dec 17 announced their support for the proposed amendment.

Dr Mahathir said the Government would present the proposed amendment to the Council of Rulers before it is tabled in the Dewan Rakyat next month.

A special meeting of the Rulers will be held on Jan 16, two days before the proposed amendment is tabled in the Dewan Rakyat.