

UMNO AGREES TO MEET RULERS

30 DEC 1997

Party to explain move at Jan 9 informal talks

By WONG CHUN WAI

KUALA LUMPUR: Umno has agreed to an unofficial meeting with the Rulers to discuss the proposed amendments to the Constitution to lift their immunity.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is Umno president, said yesterday that the party would be represented by him, his deputy Abdul Ghafar Baba and the three vice-presidents — Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid.

The meeting, to be held before the Conference of Rulers on Jan 16, had been tentatively fixed for Jan 9 but the venue had not been decided, he said.

“We feel we can explain to the Rulers the intention of the move (to amend the Constitution) so that they will not doubt our decision.

“The draft of the proposed amendments would be given to the Rulers at the informal meeting,” he told news-

men after visiting Angkasapuri. Dr Mahathir said the monthly Umno Supreme Council meeting would also be held on Jan 9.

The Government! he reiterated, had no plans to abolish the institution of the Rulers, only their immunity.

On Sunday, the Sultan of Pahang called for an informal meeting between the Rulers and national leadership before the Conference of Rulers.

To a question, Dr Mahathir said the Attorney-General had prepared the draft on the constitutional amendments but the Government had yet to study it.

He said the draft was discussed at his meeting last week with the nine mentris besar, including the Mentri Besar of Kelantan, in which the Attorney-General was also present.

“Based on the discussions, the Attorney-General has prepared a draft and it will be studied by the Government at the Cabinet meeting next Wednesday,” he added.

Dr Mahathir said the amendments would centre on Article 181 (2) of the Constitution which states that no proceedings whatsoever shall be brought in any court against the Ruler of a state in his personal capacity.

Asked whether the lifting of the immunity would also include immunity from civil suits, Dr Mahathir said the Government could not make an announcement on this as discussions were going on.

On the response of the Rulers towards the proposed amendments, he said: “There have been no direct rejections.”

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On his meeting with Umno division heads today, Dr Mahathir said the briefing was necessary as Umno leaders had been hearing all kinds of views.

On a proposed Semangat 46 rally at Istana Bukit Serene in Johor Baru, Dr Mahathir warned that no one should attempt to break the law, adding that it was possible someone was trying to exploit the situation for political gains.

"If we allow one section to break the law without taking any action, the other side may then ask why they, too, cannot break the law?" he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Government did not know whether

any had any connection with the Istana as alleged by Johor Semangat deputy chairman Haji Abdul Kahar Ahmad who claimed that the Sultan had consented to be the guest-of-honour at the "meet the people" rally on Jan 8.

Asked whether Umno had plans to counter Semangat 46's proposed nationwide gatherings to oppose the amendments, he said if necessary, the Government would explain its stand to the people.

"The rakyat has the right to listen to what is really happening. If they (Semangat) want to have a road show, they can go ahead, but let's see whose show is bigger," he said.