

Rulers' power on Pardons Board to be curbed says PM

By FAUZIAH ISMAIL

THE proposed amendments to remove the immunity of the Rulers from criminal and civil prosecution will include the removal of part of the Rulers' power on the Pardons Board and a amendment on the provision on sedition.

The consequential amendments are essential to ensure the effectiveness of the amendment to Article 181 (2) of the Federal Constitution relating to the Rulers' immunity, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told reporters after a two-hour briefing with 1,560 Umno divisional, information, Youth and Wanita heads in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Under the proposed consequential amendments, Dr Mahathir said Rulers will no longer have the power to pardon themselves and immediate members of their family of criminal charges.

"The right to pardon will be transferred to other parties... maybe to other Rulers," the Prime Minister said.

They will, however, continue to sit on the Pardons Board in respect of other cases.

The gathering fully endorsed the proposed amendments and urged the Government to be firm in handling the matter.

On the proposed amendment to the provision on sedition in the Federal Constitution, Dr Mahathir said it is essential as any allegation against Rulers who commit any offence come under the definition of "sedition". "If a person goes to the police station and alleges that a Ruler has committed an offence, this in itself is sedition. This will prevent the public from making complaints regarding any criminal offence committed by the Rulers," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Government has received the draft on the proposed amendments from Attorney-General Tan Sri Abu Talib Othman. He said the amendments would not be retrospective.

The Cabinet will study the draft at its weekly meeting on January 7 and the Umno Supreme Council will convene a meeting on January 9. On the same date (January 9), Umno leaders will meet the Rulers unofficially to explain to the Rulers the proposed amendments.

A Conference of Rulers on January 16, two days before Parliament debates the amendments, is to be convened to discuss the amendments.

The Bill on the amendments will be tabled at the Dewan Rakyat on January 18 and the Dewan Negara on January 20. It will subsequently be submitted to the Rulers for their consent.

"Our unofficial meetings with the Rulers and the Conference of Rulers are not meant to seek their consent on the matter. The two meetings will be to explain to the Rulers that the proposed amendments are meant to

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remove their immunity and not abolish the institution.

"Their consent will only be sought after the Bill has been approved by Parliament. At the stage when the Bill is debated in Parliament, it is not law. We have the right to debate on it in Parliament even without the consent of the Rulers," he said.

He expressed confidence that the Conference of Rulers will give its consent to the Bill after it is passed by

Parliament. The Government only needs a simple majority and not a unanimous vote from the Rulers for the Bill to become law.

Dr Mahathir said he wanted the proposed amendments to the Federal Constitution to be handled in a proper and orderly manner. "I disapprove of any confrontational approaches.

"That is why I asked the Menteri Besar to brief their respective Rulers on the Government's intention dur-

ing my meeting with them. That is also the reason why Umno does not hold rallies. These will only result in creating a more tense situation. It will not be good for the people," he said.

Dr Mahathir said last Monday he had an audience with the Yang di Pertuan Agong, Sultan Azlan Shah, on the issue. The proposed January 9 meeting with the Rulers was, in fact, arranged after his audience with the Agong.