

Stand on constitutional amendments to be made in a week

Sun 10 JAN 1993

Rulers want more time

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — The Malay Rulers have asked that they be given until next Saturday to make their stand on the proposed constitutional amendments to remove their immunity, Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Dr Mahathir said the Rulers made the request during a two-hour meeting with senior Umno leaders at Istana Negara. With the exception of the Sultan of Kelantan, all other Rulers attended the meeting which began about 3pm.

Selangor was represented by the Regent Tengku Idris Shah. Perak was represented by Raja Nazrin Shah.

A special Conference of Rulers will be held on Jan 16.

At a Press conference at his office after the meeting, the Prime Minister said: "Today's discussion was good. The Government explained the reasons behind the proposed amendments and their possibilities. It (the meeting) was inconclusive but it does not mean the amendments were rejected."

He said it was not fair for Umno to comment on the actual dialogue that took place in today's meeting. Asked why the Sultan of Kelantan was absent at the meeting, Dr Mahathir said there was nobody from Ke-

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Bar Council wants tribunal

Dr Mahathir said: "I am very realistic."

Dr Mahathir said he did not think that the matter could be easily resolved by "convening the meeting and securing an agreement".

"We did expect the Rulers to have an in-depth deliberation on the matter and, for this, they wanted a week to decide," he added.

Dr Mahathir said Umno's feeling on the issue had never changed and the Rulers' reaction was anticipated.

When asked if the Sultan of Johor gave his views, Dr Mahathir said: "I think it is improper for me to mention names."

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Dr Mahathir said the Umno delegation was "very frank" with the Rulers, and so were the Rulers.

Asked whether the Rulers expressed reservations on the proposed amendments, he replied: "Yes, there were. They gave their views on why the amendments should not proceed but we explained why they should."

Asked whether the Rulers had voiced specific reservations on the proposed amendments, Dr Mahathir said the Rulers' reservations were general.

On whether there were Rulers who supported the proposed amendments at today's meeting, Dr Mahathir said he could not determine this. "They did not raise their hands."

But from the discussions, Dr Mahathir got the impression that the Rulers would be happier if there are no amendments at all.

When asked if the Government was willing to meet the Rulers half-way should there be further reservations, Dr Mahathir said: "We will wait until Jan 16 for their views ... to see whether they accept or not."

He said Umno's stand on the matter was made after it had carried out an in-depth study on the proposed amendments and "feel that they were appropriate".

He said the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Azlan Shah distributed copies of the draft of the proposed amendments to the other Rulers.

Asked whether he was optimistic of the outcome of the proposed amendments,

lantan to explain (the absence).

He said the Umno delegation also did not ask the other Rulers why the Sultan of Kelantan was absent.

When asked what would happen if the Bill is passed in Parliament but without the King's assent, he said: "Well, normally we expect the King to give his assent but if he doesn't, we will look into the matter."

Earlier, after chairing an Umno supreme council meeting, Dr Mahathir said the proposed amendments would be debated in Parliament even if the Rulers rejected them on Jan 16.

He said the proposed amendments would follow the established procedures after being debated in Parliament.

After the amendments have been debated and passed in the Dewan Rakyat on Jan 18 and 19 and in the Dewan Negara on Jan 20, they would be submitted for Royal Assent.

He expressed confidence that the Bill would get the support of two-thirds of the Dewan Rakyat and Dewan Negara members.

The Bill will be distributed to MPs next week.

Dr Mahathir said the amendments would also specify that the Rulers would continue to enjoy immunity in the execution of their official duties.

"This means that in carrying out their duty of giving assent to laws or doing anything on behalf of the Government, they will continue to enjoy immunity and can-

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Rulers held preparatory meeting

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not be prosecuted.

"If they commit any offence in their personal capacity, action can be taken against them in accordance with existing laws.

"If they beat people, do things to people and do not pay loans, then they can be charged in the courts. This is to protect the rights and interests of the people," Dr Mahathir said.

He said the amendments would also repeal existing provisions in the Federal

Constitution which forbid MPs and State Assemblymen from discussing and debating issues connected with Rulers and members of their families in Parliament and State Assemblies.

He said this would allow Parliament and the State Assemblies to criticise the royalty if there was any wrongdoing and was aimed at protecting the Rulers through reminders.

These proceedings, he said, could be reported in the Press.

The Rulers had a preparatory meeting among themselves in the morning at the same venue before the meeting with the Umno leaders.

Besides Dr Mahathir, Umno was also represented by deputy president Encik Abdul Ghafar Baba, vice-presidents Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid, Umno Youth leader Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and Umno Wanita leader Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz.