

Chance of a solution: PM

17 JAN 1993

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Rulers have put off the decision on whether to give their consent to the constitution amendments which seek to remove their legal immunity.

They are expected to make the decision tomorrow when the Conference of Rulers meets officially.

In the meantime, they have asked Attorney-General Tan Sri Abu Talib Othman to take a second look at the Bill, and the Government has agreed to the request.

"We are seeing our way into finding a solution," Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told reporters outside Istana Negara after meeting the Rulers.

"The Attorney-General has been asked to look into the matter. There is some chance of finding a solution."

The Prime Minister, together with his deputy Ghafar Baba and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim were hastily asked to go to the palace an hour after the Rulers had started their meeting.

Dr Mahathir was in the midst of a meeting with the Mentris Besar and Chief Ministers at his office when the call from the palace came at 11.45am.

Further indications that the Bill may be amended came from Abu Talib. Asked whether the Bill might be amended, he said: "Maybe ... maybe."

"I will go back and consider. I will seek a solution to resolve this problem but it's still too early for me to comment."

Asked which part of the draft might be amended, he said: "That has to be studied. Give me a chance to study it first."

On whether there was time to amend the draft of the Bill since Parliament was meeting tomorrow, Abu Talib said:

"Let's wait and see ... we can determine that when the time comes."

Asked which provisions in the draft were disputed by the Rulers, he said: "I did not attend the meeting. I do not know what happened."

The Rulers, who attended the meeting yesterday, were the Yang di-Pertuan Besar of Negri Sembilan, the Raja of Perlis, the Sultans of Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang and Johor, and the Regents of Selangor and Perak.

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Informal meeting lasted more than three hours

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The Rulers began arriving at Istana Negara at 9.30am. Their meeting, which started at 11am, lasted over three hours.

It was their fifth informal meeting since the Government announced its decision to amend the Constitution.

Earlier, there were some doubts over the status of the Conference of Rulers meeting as the Prime Minister and Mentris Besar were not asked to attend.

Anwar said yesterday the official Conference of Rulers meeting would be held tomorrow and a decision would be made.

However, he was not certain whether the Prime Minister would

attend the meeting.

"Today's meeting was not official but indications are the meeting with Rulers had gone well.

"I am hopeful that a solution can be found unlike the scenario several days ago," he said.

The Bill, which was circulated to MPs and Senators on Tuesday, seeks to include five new provisions and amend two others in the Federal Constitution.

They mainly seek to remove the Rulers' immunity in their personal capacity and contain special provisions on their powers of pardon.

The Bill also seeks to remove any restriction on debate over matters pertaining to the Rulers as long as it did not advocate the abolition of the constitutional monarchy.