

Rulers-Mahathir

MAHATHIR SAYS FURTHER CONSULTATIONS ARE FUTILE

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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 18 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today it was futile for the government to consult further with the Malay Rulers at this time on the constitutional amendments tabled in the Dewan Rakyat to remove the Rulers' legal immunity.

He said the Rulers should have kept to the agreement reached at the several meetings on the matter.

"We gave them enough time and the matter is a simple one; there is nothing complicated in it," he told reporters at the lobby of Parliament House.

He was asked for his comments on the Conference of Rulers withholding consent to the proposed amendments. The Federal Constitution provides for the Rulers' consent to be given to any law to be passed which relates to the monarchy.

Dr Mahathir said both the Rulers and the government discussed in detail the amendments, including the Rulers' proposal for a special court to hear cases involving them. -- more

▼18/01/22-41MST .

CNS8386

U GE 18-01 00128 EA731

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He said it seemed that the discussions were totally meaningless.

"We are disappointed because we believed from the discussions that they were in agreement...at least six of them agreed but something else happened today," he said.

"I feel there is nothing more to be discussed...the principle is simple and we have explained the three matters to be amended, relating to legal immunity, sedition and clemency," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he did not know why the Rulers changed their mind.

He said the Rulers could consider the amendments in the period between the passing of the Bill in Parliament and the royal assent by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong. -- more

▼18/01/22-46MST

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Asked what the next course of action would be if the royal assent was not given, Dr Mahathir said Parliament would discuss the Bill again after a period of 30 days.

If the royal assent was not given in the following 30 days, he said the Bill would automatically become law based on the constitutional amendments made in 1983.

He said that if the Rulers disputed the law, they could take the matter to court.

Asked why the proposed amendments were tabled in the Dewan Rakyat, Dr Mahathir said it was to allow the MPs to make a stand on the matter.

"When the MPs make their stand, the Rulers will be aware of the people's feelings and they may change their mind," he said.

He said that if nothing was done the Rulers would get the impression that there was no opposition to their stand. -- more

CNS8392

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Dr Mahathir said the government would proceed with the fresh proposal to set up a special court for the Rulers though they did not give their consent to the original amendments.

"We will still do so because we are not unwilling to accept ideas in order to protect the status of the rulers...when they suggested to us that they should not be tried in an ordinary court, we agreed with them," he said.

He said the special court not only safeguarded the position of the Rulers but also allowed the people to seek redress through the due process of law.

On the proposal of the Rulers for the setting up of an advisory board to remove a Ruler before he is charged or sued, Dr Mahathir said: "We don't think it will work because Rulers are related to each other...they may have vested interest, they may have personal interest."

Dr Mahathir rejected the view of the Conference of Rulers that the proposed amendments by the government were radical.

"What is radical about it...there is an opinion that the Rulers are not above the law," he said. -- Bernama

▼18/01/23-04MST