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Rulers-Constitution

CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUE: ALL EYES ON KUALA LUMPUR

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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 18 (Bernama) <sup>93</sup> <sup>19</sup> - The whole country is focussing its attention on Kuala Lumpur today with full optimism that the government and the Malay Rulers would reach agreement on the proposed constitutional amendments to strip the Rulers of their legal immunity.

The spotlight would be on Parliament, where a special three-day sitting to debate the Constitution (Amendment) Bill opens this afternoon. The Dewan Rakyat meets today and tomorrow, and the Dewan Negara the day after that.

Preceding the Parliament session would be a formal meeting of the Conference of Rulers at Istana Negara where the Rulers will make their stand on the government-proposed amendments.

The government is not expected to face any difficulty in securing the two-thirds majority needed to pass the Bill.

Apart from the solid support of MPs from the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN), the Bill would probably get the backing of the majority of the opposition members, particularly from the DAP. -- more

▼18/01/10-11MST

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Although six of the nine Rulers yesterday agreed to the amendments with some changes to those proposed in the Bill, an official decision would only be made at today's meeting of the Conference of Rulers.

The six who have agreed are the Yang di-Pertuan Besar of Negeri Sembilan, Raja of Perlis, Sultan of Pahang, Sultan of Terengganu, and the Regents of Selangor and Perak.

The agreement was reached at an informal meeting they had with a three-member government delegation led by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at Istana Negara. The Sultans of Johor, Kelantan and Kedah did not attend the meeting.

Dr Mahathir told reporters after the meeting that the government and the Rulers had reached agreement on the issue.

It is believed that the proposed changes to the Bill were discussed at this morning's meetings of the Cabinet and the BN Supreme Council.

Judging from the latest developments, it would not be impossible that the three Rulers absent from yesterday's meeting would also go along with the revised amendments. -- more

▼18/01/10-32MST

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The Bill seeks to add five provisions to the Federal Constitution and amend two articles.

The provisions proposed are Articles 38(2)(d), 42(12), 63(5), 72(5) and 181(3) while those to be amended are Articles 32 and 181(2).

In general, the amendments seek to abolish the legal immunity enjoyed by the Rulers in their personal capacity, transfer their powers of pardon to the Conference of Rulers in certain cases, and enable MPs and state assemblymen to debate on matters concerning the Rulers so long as their statements were not aimed at abolishing the institution of Rulers.

Good sense, wisdom and patience on the part of all concerned are expected to prevail today, and thus resolve the impasse to remove the people's anxiety and place the institution of Constitutional Monarchy on a firmer footing. -- Bernama

▼18/01/10-56MST