

CNS8355

U GE 18-01 00179 EA724

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Rptng, inserting "reportedly" in intro

Rulers-crisis

RULERS CHANGE MIND, SPARK OFF CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS

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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 18⁹³ (Bernama) -- The government today went ahead with its proposal to remove the legal immunity of the Malay Rulers though the Rulers, who until yesterday had reportedly indicated they will give their consent, changed their mind at the last minute.

This unexpected development is likely to spark off a constitutional crisis far worse than ever experienced, say observers.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tabled the Constitution (Amendment) Bill at a special sitting of the Dewan Rakyat today, hardly two hours after the Conference of Rulers had said in a statement they were withholding consent for the law.

A crisis is expected to emerge because Article 38 (4) of the Federal Constitution states that "no law directly affecting the privileges, position, honours or dignities of the Rulers shall be passed without the consent of the Conference of Rulers. -- more

end of rptn

▼18/01/21-40MST

U GE 18-01 00174 EA727

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Rulers-crisis 2 Kuala Lumpur

The statement by the Conference of Rulers today surprised many because the meetings between the Rulers and the government on Saturday and yesterday had given the picture that a positive solution would be reached today.

Dr Mahathir told reporters tonight he did not know what happened today.

"We were made to believe from our discussions (at an informal meeting with six of the Rulers) that they were in agreement. At least six of them agreed," he said.

"But something else happened today. Although we had accommodated them and had discussed the setting up of a special court in detail, it seems that the discussions were meaningless," he added.

The six Rulers who had attended yesterday's informal meeting reportedly gave the indication that they agreed to the amendments with several additions.

The additions were agreed to by the government, including their request for a provision to set up a special court for the Rulers. -- more

▼18/01/22-06MST

U GE 18-01 00220 EA728

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\ Rulers-crisis 3 Kuala Lumpur

Observers said a crisis could yet be averted if the Malay Rulers gave their consent before the Yang di-Pertuan Agong gave the royal assent to the Bill after its passage through the Dewan Rakyat and Dewan Negara.

Dr Mahathir himself, in his speech tabling the Bill, said he hoped that the Rulers would give their consent to the amendments once the Bill had been passed.

The Rulers had said in their statement that they were not in a position to give their consent on certain proposals in the original Bill and to subsequent amendments without further deliberation and consultation with the government.

They said they were also sensitive to the aspirations of the rakyat for truth and justice.

Observers said that if this was truly the feelings of the Malay Rulers, it would not be difficult to reach a solution.

But if the Rulers were still reluctant to give their consent, the government had said it was prepared to face any eventuality, including going to court.

Observers said the question now was no longer the position of the Rulers but the practice of parliamentary democracy in Malaysia which, according to Dr Mahathir, would be unable to exist fully. -- more

▼18/01/22-23MST

CNS8383

U GE 18-01 00140 EA729

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Rulers-crisis 4 (last) Kuala Lumpur

The reaction of the opposition political parties to today's developments was varied.

Parti Semangat 46 president Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, in his speech in the Dewan Rakyat before he and four other MPs of the party walked out, appealed to the government and other quarters not to engage in confrontation with the Rulers.

"Do not close the door to consultation. Consult with them. Resolve this matter as best as you can," he said.

Opposition Leader and DAP secretary-general Encik Lim Kit Siang supported the Bill but raised doubts as to the validity of the Bill without the Rulers' consent.

PAS deputy president Haji Hadi Awang also supported the Bill but wanted it to be streamlined with the requirements of Islam. -- Bernama

♥1R/01/22-21MST