

▼19/01/23-50MST

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Parliament - Mahathir

MEANINGLESS TO NEGOTIATE WITH THE RULERS NOW, MAHATHIR

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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 19 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight that even if talks are to be held with the Rulers for months to secure their agreement to remove their legal immunity, they are unlikely to agree.

Despite the government's readiness to hold talks with the Rulers, and the experience with them since Jan 9, it was clear they were unlikely to agree and accept the amendments.

Winding up the debate on the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 1993 at a special session of the Dewan Rakyat, he said: "From our experience during the talks, the Rulers do not want to be judged."

"Even if we talk for months and even if the DAP tries, it is unlikely there will be agreement (from the Rulers)," he said. -- more

▼19/01/22-50MST

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Dr Mahathir said the efforts and talks with the Rulers since Jan 9 at one level appeared to have bright prospects for success but at the last moment the Rulers did not agree to them.

At the meeting on Jan 9 between the Rulers on the one hand and Deputy Prime Minister Ghafar Baba, Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and himself, the government's proposals were explained to them, he said.

At the Istana Negara, the three government representatives held a two-hour meeting with five rulers.

According to Dr Mahathir, at that meeting the Rulers suggested ways in which to judge the errant Rulers. The Rulers did not make any counter proposals to the proposed amendments.

Dr Mahathir said the Rulers suggested that a Tribunal be set up by the Rulers Conference to judge Rulers who have committed offences.

Only after the Ruler had been removed from the throne should he be tried in open court, they said. -- more

19/01/23-23MST

CNS9093

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However, the Rulers' suggestion was not agreed to because if the Ruler after having been removed from the throne, was found to be not guilty by the courts, in which case he could not return to the throne, Dr Mahathir said.

The government representatives then proposed the setting up of a Special Court where the errant Ruler need not have to be removed from the throne before his trial. The Ruler would be bound by the normal laws and carry out the usual sentence if he was found guilty.

At this point the government felt the issue was settled but the Attorney-General was later informed that the Rulers did not agree to it.

He said that on Jan 16, he, Ghafar Baba and Anwar Ibrahim were again summoned to the palace at 4pm for talks with four Rulers, two Regents and the Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

At that meeting, the government representatives were told by one of the Rulers that the matter of immunity and amendments to the Sedition Act did not arise anymore, Dr Mahathir said.

Following this, the talks did not focus on the constitution amendments but only touched on the Special Court to judge Rulers accused of committing crimes.

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▼19/01/23-35MST

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Dr Mahathir said from the reaction of the Rulers present at the meeting on Jan 16, it was clear to the government that they had agreed to the amendments.

This was because the Rulers did not say they disagreed to the amendments, the Prime Minister said.

On Jan 17, he said that he, Ghafar, Anwar and the Attorney-General were again summoned to the Istana Negara to discuss further the setting up of the Special Court.

At that meeting the composition of the Special Court was discussed. At that meeting, the Rulers asked that the court comprise the Lord President and four judges to be appointed by the Rulers but the government proposed that the court comprise the Lord President and two judges one appointed by the government and the other by the Rulers.

Following the meeting, the government was confident that the Rulers would support the amendments proposed by the government. -- more

▼19/01/23-45MST

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Dr Mahathir said that on the following day, Jan 18, he was asked to come to the Istana alone for a meeting with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, the Sultan of Pahang and the Yang Dipertuan Besar of Negeri Sembilan at which he was told that the Rulers had rejected the amendments.

He said from the experience it went through, the government could no longer hold to what the Rulers had said. There would be no other decision to resolve the crisis.

"We are for resolving the crisis, but it should be through the courts. I have stated the government's readiness on this when I tabled the Bill yesterday," he said. -- Bernama

▼19/01/23-54MST