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Mahathir-Reaction

AMENDMENTS NOT MEANT TO RID SPECIAL PRIVILEGES OF RULERS, SAYS MAHATHIR

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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 19 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight the amendments to the Federal Constitution to abolish the legal immunity enjoyed by the Malay Rulers passed by the Dewan Rakyat was not an act to remove their special privileges.

As far as the constitution was concern, there was no mention of provision for the immunity of the Rulers but the law clearly spelled out that that no court proceedings shall be brought against them.

"They have never had any privilege to commit crime, so when we take this action we are not taking anything from them. We are merely creating an avenue to overcome the possibilities that they may commit crime (in future)," he told reporters at Parliament House after the Constitution (Amendment) Bill was approved by more than two-thirds majority.

Dr Mahathir said under the existing situation, there was no way for anyone to seek redress when Rulers committed crime (against them).

The government was making a provision for the people to do so, he added.

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"The Rulers may argue that not being liable to be taken to court is a privilege but that is for them to refer to the courts to seek clarification," he said.

The Prime Minister did not rule out the option to re-write the constitution to overcome the obvious deadlock but he stressed that the situation did not yet warrant such action.

He said the government would avoid re-writing the constitution for as long as it could.

Asked whether the amendments would pave the way for criminal proceedings to be brought against the Sultan of Johor, Dr Mahathir said: "This law does not apply retrospectively... unless he commits a new offence."

He disagreed with a suggestion that the country faced a constitutional crisis because of the rejection by the Rulers to the amendments.

He said the people were of a level-headed society who would prefer to see the country prosper economically.

Commenting on the abstention by DAP and PAS MPs during block voting, Dr Mahathir said their stand reflected their inability to make a decision on an important question. -- Bernama

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