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Rulers-Mahathir

UMNO SUPREME COUNCIL ENDORSES GOVERNMENT'S ACTION

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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 26 (Bernama) ⁹³ (P) -- The Umno Supreme Council today endorsed government's decision to stop giving privileges not provided for under the Federal Constitution to Malay Rulers, a decision which among others ends the granting of timber and land concessions for them.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the government's decision, made by the Cabinet last Wednesday, was with immediate effect.

"We'll give what is rightly theirs. We'll not withdraw them. But, the rest we'll have to take back.

"For example, there is no provision for supplementary monetary benefits. The monetary benefits were said to be inadequate, hence the need to grant them timber and land concessions," he said at a news conference after chairing the special meeting of the Umno Supreme Council at the party's headquarters here.

The special meeting, which lasted for four hours, was convened to discuss the constitutional amendments stripping the Malay Rulers of their immunity. A bill to the effect was passed by Parliament last week. --more

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On the extravagance and lavish lifestyle of Malay Rulers as highlighted in the local mass media, Dr Mahathir who is Umno president, said the government and Umno were fully aware that the privileges accorded to the Rulers had exceeded that provided under the constitution.

"We've tried to reject in a polite manner requests not provided under the law by the Rulers. Unfortunately to no avail. Instead the immunity accorded to the Rulers has been extended to their children," he said.

He said the government did not reject the Rulers' requests simply because to do so would create tension between the government and the Rulers.

However, he said the government now adopted a different stand because the Rulers wanted to stick to the letter and not the spirit of the law in the issue of the constitutional amendments.

"The government will stick to the law, no more and no less," he said.

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He said the Umno Supreme Council supported fully the government's stand and "we feel it is that of the people too."

Dr Mahathir stressed that the constitutional amendments were merely aimed at limiting immunity of the Rulers.

"We've no intention whatsoever to abolish the system of constitutional monarchy," he said, pointing out that the government allocated about RM200 million a year for palaces throughout the country.

"We'll continue to maintain ties with the Rulers as provided for under the law. It's not true that we'll sever ties with them," he said.

He also said he had no plan to visit various parts of the country just to explain the issue to the people. --more

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Responding to questions, Dr Mahathir said it was up to the Rulers whether they wanted to challenge the amendments in court.

He also said the government would not compromise on the question of immunity because it could not let the Rulers hurt the people or dishonour their debts. --Bernama

▼26/01/21-53MST