

Umno endorses decision to

By Jeffrey Ramayah and Vijayan Menon

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — The Umno supreme council today endorsed the Government's decision to withdraw all unscheduled and unbudgeted allocations and perks which have been given to the Rulers in the past, party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister said the withdrawal of the perks and other unscheduled privileges would take immediate effect.

"There is absolutely no provision for us to give salary supplements such as allocating land or giving shares to the Rulers," he told re-

porters after chairing a special four-hour Umno supreme council meeting.

The meeting also discussed Parliament's approval of the amendments to the Constitution which were aimed at removing the immunity of the Rulers in their personal capacity.

Dr Mahathir said the Government was of the opinion that the Rulers should not be allowed to enjoy perks and privileges which were not provided for by the law.

"In the past we have allowed the extras to be given and we did that out of respect for the Rulers.

"It has been difficult for us to withdraw the unscheduled and unbudgeted alloca-

tions but since the Rulers want to stick to the law as regards their assent to the amendments, we will also now abide strictly by the provisions of the law," he added.

Dr Mahathir said he explained the amendments to the supreme council members and stressed that there was no such thing as legal immunity for the Rulers.

"The law only states that they cannot be charged in court.

"There is no such provision that the Rulers can assault people or threaten the rakyat.

"The Rulers do not have the right to assault, cheat or refuse to pay loans taken," he said.

He said the amendments

were to clarify the actual situation which was that they could not act above the law.

Dr Mahathir said that many people had expressed regret at the over-spending of Rulers and their lifestyles.

"This has for a long time attracted the attention of the Government and Umno and we tried to withdraw all unscheduled provisions in a disciplined manner and in accordance with our culture and customs.

"But these were not effective and the immunity given to the Rulers was even extended to their children.

"And even when their children committed offences, we did not take any form of action.

withdraw perks

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"Whenever we tried to remove these unscheduled allocations, the relations between the Rulers and the Government became strained.

"This was discussed in detail during the debate on the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 1993 and we made it clear that we do not want to abolish the rights of the Rulers.

"Whatever is their right will be retained and only what is beyond the scope of legal provisions will be withdrawn," he said.

He said the Government had no intention whatsoever of abolishing the constitutional monarchy.

He said the Government had not quantified the amount that would be saved

with the withdrawal of additional perks given to the Rulers but added that the amount would be substantial.

When asked what was the total yearly amount spent by the Government on the Rulers and the palaces, he said the amount was estimated at RM200 million.

When asked whether the Government was prepared to compromise with the Rulers in getting their approval for the amendments, Dr Mahathir said: "The Government will not compromise on its principles. We cannot compromise on assaults and other offences."

Dr Mahathir said it was untrue for anyone to say that the Government want-

ed to cut off all its relations and communication with the Rulers.

"There will be communication but only on an official basis and only when it is necessary," he said.

On the decision by the Johor Baru Sessions Court to accept the son of the Sultan of Johor, Tunku Bendahara Abdul Majid Idris, compounding the charge against him, he said the Government would not interfere in any court decision.

"It is up to the courts to make their own decisions.

"What we are against is that no one should have legal immunity," he said.

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