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Mahathir-privileges

PRIVILEGES OF RULERS NOT CURTAILED OUT OF REVENGE, SAYS MAHATHIR

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JITRA, Jan 29⁹³ (Bernama) ^(P) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the government decision to follow the letter of the law in the provision of facilities and privileges to the Rulers was not motivated by spite.

He said the government did not wish to be spiteful but it initiated the move because it could no longer tolerate the habit of the Rulers who demanded privileges that were not rightly theirs.

"It is not because we are being spiteful. For a long time now we wanted to put an end to it but we could not do so," he said at a meet-the-people gathering with Kubang Pasu residents at the Dewan Jitra here.

Dr Mahathir, who is Member of Parliament for Kubang Pasu, said the Rulers' demands for privileges that were not rightly theirs under the constitution was not meagre but amounted to thousands of millions of ringgit.

Although the government did not wish to be spiteful, he admitted that the way the government went about it was "a little harsh." -- more

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He said: "We gave them all the facilities but they wanted more. When a Ruler demands them, it is difficult for the officers to say no.

"With me too, when (I) refused, (they) put on a long face. Sometimes, (they) pressed me to approve them."

He said that the Rulers demanded for timber concessions, spent extravagantly on overseas tours, imported cars without approved permit (AP), failed to pay tax and resold the duty-free cars to "towkays."

There were also reports that the Rulers built palaces with up to 40 rooms, he added.

He said that the thousands of millions spent on Rulers' privileges were not their money but that of the people.

Dr Mahathir said although not all the Rulers acted that way, "each Ruler is somewhat involved."

"As if, the Rulers are not enough, their princes also acted the same way," he added.

He said it was not that the government did not criticise the conduct of the Rulers because it had done so many times but the situation persisted.

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The Prime Minister said that the people chose the system of parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy when achieving independence because it was thought that the people would be protected.

History had proven that the feudal system and absolute monarchy practised before and during the British administration denied the people a role in the administration and their well-being was not given due attention.

He reminded the people to learn a lesson from the history of the formation of the Malayan Union in 1946 when the Malay Rulers signed the agreement to hand over the Malay states to the British.

When the people rose up in protest, the British eventually did not form the Malayan Union and the Federation of Malaya came about, he said.

He added that if the British had formed the Malayan Union, the Rulers would have roles only as the "kadi," having power only with regard to Malay customs and the Islamic religion.

He said this showed that under the feudal system, where the people's fate were left in the hands of the Rulers, the Rulers did not protect the people's rights. -- more

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"I am saying this not to topple the Rulers but I was there (when the event took place), I did not just read about it in the history books," he said.

Dr Mahathir also denied accusations by certain parties that the government intended to set up a republic.

Later, speaking to reporters, he expressed disappointment with the opposition parties including PAS and the DAP for not voting in support of the constitutional amendments although they initially gave their support.

He said that PAS, which stated that there was no immunity in Islam but did not support the amendments because of the exposure of the excesses by the Rulers, showed that the party did not have principles.

"This is what we are disappointed about... why does a party which claims to be upholding Islamic teachings and has time and again claimed that there is no immunity in Islam, make an excuse that because of the exposure (of the excesses of the Rulers), it could not give its support? This is not right," he added.

Also present at the function was Kedah Menteri Besar Tan Sri Osman Aroff. -- Bernama.

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