

Malays saved the Rulers in 1946, says PM

THE Malay Rulers would have been reduced to chief kadis if not for the Malays' strong protest against Britain's plan to form the Malayan Union in 1946, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

He said the Sultans, who were then absolute Rulers of the Malay States, had given their consent to British rule "without even seeking the rakyat's opinion."

Dr Mahathir said this at the "Majlis Perjumpaan Mesra Bersama Perdana Menteri" in Jitra, Kedah. Also present were Menteri Besar Tan Sri Osman Aroff and other state dignitaries.

"The then Sultans of Kedah, Johor, Pahang and Selangor had agreed to turn the states into British colonies under the MacMichael Treaty. The rakyat were never consulted. However, good sense prevailed and the Malays rallied around their leaders and staged strong protests against the formation of the Malayan Union.

"Under the proposed treaty, the Sultans, by virtue of their positions as the religious heads of each State, would have been reduced to mere chief kadis. The running of the States would have been handed over to the colonial rulers," he said.

Fearing that "history might repeat itself", the Government decided to amend the Constitution on the legal immunity of the Malay Rulers in their personal capacity, Dr Mahathir said.

"It is not to seek revenge against the Rulers for not assenting to the constitutional amendments. It is because the Government can no longer stand the whims and fancies of the Rulers," he added.

"The move is drawing growing support from the people of all races. They have learnt their lessons well in not letting the Rulers decide what is best for them."

He said the Government would not let down the rakyat, especially Malays, as was done by the Sultans under colonial rule.

Dr Mahathir said the Government had been very patient with the Rulers despite their unreasonable demands which only reflected their greed to protect their interests.

On the Sultan of Kelantan's involvement in politics, the Prime Minister said the Sultan's actions, which have raised concern among Umno members, were aimed at seeing "his uncle, Semangat 46 president Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah become a Prime Minister."

The Sultan had actively campaigned in the 1990 general elections with the hope that Tengku Razaleigh would replace Dr Mahathir, he added.

"The Sultan had even gone to the extent of coughing out his money to buy clothes, to be distributed to the people, to win support. This clearly contravenes the Constitution as Rulers are not supposed

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to be involved in politics," he said.

"Certain Rulers had also interfered in the appointments of Menteri Besar although the Sultans were fully aware that they had no right in the matter."

Dr Mahathir stressed that the Government had on numerous occasions tried to remind the Rulers of their errant ways. "I had personally advised the Sultans at the Rulers' Conference in Langkawi in 1991, but to no avail.

"Even when accepting the Rulers' code of ethics, the

Sultans made several unreasonable demands, including asking for more timber concessions, before signing the proclamation," he added.

Dr Mahathir admitted that he and the Government had in the past made mistakes by "giving in to the Rulers' demands. We had done so in order to maintain good relationship with them. However, they have been very demanding and the rakyat, after realising the Sultans' greed, have decided to put an end to this."

He also criticised Kelantan Menteri Besar Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat and PAS depu-

ty president Abdul Hadi Awang for "conspiring with the Sultan of Kelantan".

Dr Mahathir said the two leaders, in persisting to back the Sultan, showed they are collaborating with the Ruler in his wrongdoings. "It seems that they fear the Sultan more than God," he added.

Later, speaking to reporters, Dr Mahathir reiterated that the Government would strive to safeguard the constitutional monarchy system, but said that nobody could be sure whether the future generations would similarly protect the system.

"We can promise that we will try to uphold the constitutional monarchy system to the fullest of our ability but we wouldn't know what the future holds for the Rulers".

He said the only way to safeguard the system and prevent the people from "scorning" the institution is for the Rulers to accept the constitutional amendments and refrain from committing offences.

Asked whether the King had assented to the Constitutional (Amendment) Bill, Dr Mahathir said so far there had been no progress.

On the move by some Rulers who organised politically-motivated gatherings over the immunity issue, Dr Mahathir said the action would undermine their image.

On the acknowledgement of the Johor State Secretary Datuk Abdul Rahim Ramli of his faults and his asking Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin for forgiveness, the Prime Minister said it was up to the Johor Government to decide whether to accept the explanation and the plea for forgiveness. — NST