

BILL ENDS EXCESSES OF ROYALTY

By WONG CHUN WAI

KUALA LUMPUR: The Government has succeeded in ending the excesses by royalty through the constitution amendments, the Prime Minister said yesterday.

Expressing confidence the issue had been resolved, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government had achieved its objective through the amendments.

He refuted claims the country was facing a constitutional crisis following Parliament's approval of the Constitution (Amendment) Bill which has yet to be given assent by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

"What we wanted to seek was a stop to all the crimes that had been committed before," he said at the launching of the National Agriculture Policy (1992-2010) at the Putra World Trade Centre.

Dr Mahathir was cheered and given a standing ovation by the over 5,000 people present.

His speech focused on the need for Malaysians, particularly Malays, to be willing to change to progress.

He also touched on the Malay custom which prohibited the people from committing treachery.

Dr Mahathir said if the Yang di-Pertuan Agong did not give

his assent, the bill would go back to Parliament for another round of debate and approval.

"When the bill is approved a second time, it will be sent to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong for assent. If he does not give assent within 30 days, the bill automatically becomes law ... no crisis," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Government could not continue giving in to the demands of the royalty.

He said the Government no longer gave funds to the royalty who had, therefore, cut down on their extravagance.

In the past, he said, the Government had remained silent when members of the royalty committed offences and as a result, they had continued with what they were doing.

At a press conference later, Dr Mahathir said the Government was in no hurry to refer the constitution amendments to Parliament though the Constitution sets a reasonable amount of time for the Yang di-Pertuan Agong to give his assent.

"We are in no hurry because the Government has achieved its objectives. Matters which we had not been satisfied with previously have been resolved," he added.

On agriculture, Dr Mahathir said although much emphasis had been placed on industrialisation, there was a need for the

country to have food security.

He said the country needed sufficient food, particularly in times of emergency, and efforts must be made to increase agricultural activities.

Malaysia, he said, was capable of producing only 65 per cent of its rice needs but this was not enough in times of emergency.

Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Ghafar Baba said the country would remain a constitutional monarchy even if other countries became republics.

He said Malaysia would never become a republic because the citizens and the Government still had a lot of respect for the Rulers.

"If other countries want to become republics, let them. We will not follow suit," Ghafar said when closing the national agricultural policy briefing yesterday, reports *Revathi Murugappan*.

Ghafar said there were signs that some of the Rulers had agreed to the amendment.

He said that amending the Constitution was the best formula the Government could think of to protect the interest of the people.

He said that in the past, the people aired their grievances about the Rulers "misconduct" to the Government but the Government had no power to interfere.