

CAN OF WORMS'

Star - 9 MAR 1993

KUALA LUMPUR: The Sultan of Kelantan "opened a can of worms" when he actively campaigned for Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah's party in the 1990 general elections, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

It was because of his action people began to openly criticise and advise the Rulers over misdeeds, he said yesterday when tabling the revised Constitution (Amendment) Bill in a special meeting of the Dewan Rakyat.

Their anger towards the Sultan reached a high point as they were "not only unable to accept his blatant disregard for the prohibition on Rulers' involvement in politics but also his attempt to put a family member in a high position — a form of nepotism which smacks of feudalism and is anti-democratic," he said.

Since then, the people no longer felt inhibited by

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customs or such laws as the Sedition Act in criticising Rulers.

"What the Sultan had done was open a can of worms. Unfortunately, his actions also smeared the reputation of the other Rulers as well.

"So when the (Douglas) Gomez incident occurred, the people criticised and took the Rulers to task," he said.

He said as a result the Government which was elected by the people could not remain silent and the Constitution amendments had to be made to protect the people.

Dr Mahathir said the Sultan of Kelantan should realise the implications of his involvement in politics.

"However, it appears he has not realised what he has done because in his efforts to reject the Constitution amendments agreed to by the other Rulers, he has claimed, among other things, the Parliamentary meeting on Jan 18 was invalid.

"He also claims that today's meeting is invalid."

Dr Mahathir said he was worried that the Sultan might have opened another can of worms. "When one side makes allegations about another, the other can do likewise."

"If the Sultan claims Parliament is not valid then Parliament can also claim, with valid reasons, his

appointment and installation as the Sultan of Kelantan may also be invalid.

Dr Mahathir said the Government had no ulterior motives towards the Sultan of Kelantan but his actions over the amendments were creating unease.

"Not only is the federal government not respected, but the other Rulers are also not respected.

"If after conducting a proper meeting, the Conference of Rulers does not stick to its own decision, who will respect the Conference of Rulers or the Rulers?"

"I do not wish to predict what the consequences

will be if there is a loss of confidence in and respect for the Conference of Rulers and the institution of monarchy because of the actions of the Sultan of Kelantan," he said.

Dr Mahathir reiterated that the Rulers were not above the law.

He said institutions such as the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Rulers, Conference of Rulers and Cabinet existed as a result of the Federal Constitution.

He said when the Federation of Malaya was formed in 1957, the Rulers signed the Federation of

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Malaya agreement and accepted basic laws which determined the status, position, and role of everyone.

"The acceptance of these laws means that everyone had subjected themselves to the law. There is no question and never has been of the Rulers being above the law."

Dr Mahathir said the only thing was that Rulers could not be brought before any court.

In fact, he said, their immunity from being brought to court was a sort of law because it was under this law that they could not be brought to court.

"If this is regarded as a privilege of the Rulers, then this privilege still remains under the

amendment proposed by the Conference of Rulers."

Dr Mahathir said the creation of a Special Court to try errant Rulers did not remove their privilege in that they still could not be brought before an ordinary court.

"Now they get an added privilege with the creation of a Special Court."

He said that for the people, they would get protection from the law from any abuse of position by the Rulers while the Rulers retained their privileges.

For the nation, the concept of constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy was given a clearer and more accurate meaning, he added.