

▼09/03/20-41151

CNS4553

R GE 09-03 00170 EA898

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Amendment-reaction

GOVERNMENT HAPPY WITH SUPPORT FOR CONSTITUTION& AMENDMENT

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KUALA LUMPUR, March 9, (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri 'Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the government was satisfied with the support given by Members of Parliament to the constitutional amendments to remove the legal immunity of the Malay Rulers in their personal capacity in the Dewan Rakyat today.

The voting showed that the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 1993 had the overwhelming support, including from the opposition, except for PAS and Parti Semangat 46, the Prime Minister told reporters after the Dewan Rakyat adjourned.

A total of 167 members voted for the bill, six abstained and seven members, six of them from Semangat 46, did not attend.

Dr Mahathir said the huge support for the bill reflected the people's aspirations on the issue.

Deputy Prime Minister Ghafar Baba, who regretted that PAS MPs abstained from voting on an important issue, described the party as a "half-baked Islamic 'party'". -- 'more

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CNS4571

R GE 09-03 00206 EA899

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Amendment-reaction 2 Kuala Lumpur

While claiming to champion the cause of Islam, PAS was not prepared to vote for the bill merely because the party wanted to please the Sultan of Kelantan, he said.

He added that PAS attached more importance to the Sultan than Islam.

The DAP support for the bill, Ghafar said, was a good move by the party. In fact they should have supported the bill at the first special sitting of the Dewan instead of abstaining on the grounds that the bill had not received the consent of the rulers.

The government had handled the issue in the best possible way as it was confident that the consent of the Rulers was not necessary for the bill to be tabled in Parliament, he added.

"Now, the Conference of Rulers has given its consent. It's better," he said.

The bill was passed with a big majority with support coming from the DAP, Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) and independents.

PAS Vice-President Haji Hadi Awang (Marang) said PAS MP's decided not to vote for the bill as the "meeting did not meet the aspirations and principle of democracy." -- more

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CNS4575

R GE 09-03 00167 EA900

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For example, PAS feared that the proposed Special Court, with two groups of judges, might not be able to do justice, he added.

"It's hard to do justice if we have two groups of judges," he said.

He also felt that it was not appropriate for the Attorney-General to be given powers to decide whether to take a Ruler to court.

DAP Secretary-General Lim Kit Siang said no one was above the law, including the rulers.

The amendment was a good move to show that the country subscribed to democracy, he added.

Dewan Rakyat Speaker Tan Sri Zahir Ismail was happy with the way the two-day special meeting progressed.

The approval of the bill by the Dewan Rakyat would remove whatever tension-existed on the issue.

"We should be proud that the system of parliamentary democracy in the country is progressing well," he said. -- Bernama