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Dr M: No doubt over sincerity of Government

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government allowed the Rulers to nominate two judges to the five-judge Special Court because it wanted to clear any doubt over its sincerity in solving the issue.

He denied Opposition allegations that the Special Court would have three "Government judges".

"There is no such thing as a Government judge. A judge is independent and there have been many instances where the Government was brought to court and decisions were given against the interests of the Government.

"Even in the case of Umno, the party was de-registered. So it is wrong to claim that the Lord President and two Chief Justices would favour the Government," he said.

He said any person charged with an offence would not be given the opportunity to choose who would judge them but added that in the case of the Special Court the Rulers could nominate two judges of their choice.

On allegations by the Opposition that there was no room for appeal for a Ruler who is found guilty, Dr Mahathir said this was because the Government did not want to bring the Rulers before the magistrates in lower courts.

"The Government does not want preliminary hearings and mentioning of cases in lower courts as the Rulers may have to be brought before young and inexperienced magistrates.

"With the setting up of the Special Court they will face qualified and experienced judges and the Rulers can have a fair and just hearing. Neither can the Government create several tiers of courts to judge the Rulers," he said.

Dr Mahathir said although there was no avenue for appeal, a Ruler who had been convicted could still be pardoned.

However, he added that even if a Ruler was pardoned it would not absolve him from the sins of the offence which would be dealt with in the hereafter.

When asked by Pas MP for Pengkalan Chepa Nik Abdullah Arshad whether the Government would allow Pas to introduce *hudud* laws in Kelantan, Dr Mahathir said Islam allowed flexibility in practising it.

He said in a country with 100 per cent Muslims, the *hudud* laws could be implemented but in a multi-racial country like Malaysia, it was necessary to look into the interest of the other races as well.

"What is the use of having a situation like Bosnia-Herzegovina where people are fighting each other and

there is no peace? Is it not better to live in peace and harmony?" he asked.

He said Pas supported a Ruler who drove off a luxury car without settling its duties, adding that although the party knew this was against the law, it condoned it.

He said if a common man had committed a similar offence, action would have been taken against him.

On criticisms that the wrongdoings of Rulers and their family members were being widely publicised, he said the Government was dutybound to explain to the *rakyat* the reasons for removing the personal immunity of the Rulers.

He said if the Government had not given a plausible explanation, the people would not have supported the move.

He also hit out at Opposition leaders for continuously putting the Government in a bad light when they met the foreign media.

"The DAP leaders do this because they know if action is taken against them by the Government for any wrongdoing, they could expect the foreign media to highlight the issue in their publications."

He said that DAP secretary-general Lim Kit Siang was known for committing sedition by speaking on sensitive issues, including racial and communal matters.

When Lim asked the Prime Minister whether this meant the Government was afraid of him (Lim), Dr Mahathir described it as wishful thinking on the part of the Tanjong MP.

"He thinks he is very big but actually he is very small," said Dr Mahathir, who added that the Opposition would use any issue to criticise the Government merely to fish for votes in general elections.

He said Malaysia was a democratic country and respected human rights, adding that this was why Lim could get himself elected to Parliament and speak freely on any issue.

"If he were to try this same tactic in Bosnia he would have been slaughtered," he said.

He praised Karpal Singh (DAP-Jelutong) for his vociferous support for the amendments and added in jest that in the event Lim took any action against Karpal, "I will give you full protection," he said, pointing to Karpal.

On the allegation by the Opposition that the Government did not take any action against the present Tengku Mahkota of Johor for allegedly raping a 19-year-old girl in a disco in Johor Baru, Dr Mahathir said since no report had been lodged the police could not investigate.