

Amendment Bill passed with bigger majority

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Members of Parliament from the ruling Barisan Nasional and the opposition DAP and Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) voted together in support of the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 1993 to remove the personal immunity of the Rulers.

Their votes and those of four Independents gave the Bill, which was approved by Parliament in January but returned to the Dewan Rakyat with modifications by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, an overwhelming 167-vote support.

Of the other 13 MPs of the 180-member Lower House, six of the seven from Pas who were present abstained while six representatives of Semangat 46 were absent from the two-day special meeting.

All the 129 Barisan Nasional MPs, the Independents

from Sarawak, 20 from the DAP and 14 from the PBS voiced their support for the Bill when the vote count was made at 6.05pm.

A second round of voting during the committee stage taken at 6.20pm was also supported by 167 MPs with six abstentions.

Those who were absent from the House were Semangat 46 president Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah (Gua Musang) and members Datuk Abdul Manan Othman (Kuala Terengganu), Wan Omar Wan Majid (Pasir Puteh), Hani Ishak (Kota Bar-u), Sukri Mohamed (Kok Lanas), Ibrahim Pateh Mohamed (Tanah Merah) as well as Pas MP for, Rantau Panjang Sanusi Dam Mar-iok.

(The original constitutional amendment Bill was approved by the Dewan Ra-

kyat on Jan 19 with 133 votes. All the 129 Barisan MPs and four Independents from Sarawak voted for the Bill, while 16 DAP and seven Pas members abstained.

(Absent from the House then were the 14 MPs from PBS, four from DAP and six from Semangat 46.)

When winding up the two-day debate today, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that after the Bill became law it would remove the culture of fear which had obstructed the implementation of the rule of law in cases involving the royalty.

He said since the Federal Constitution decreed that no legal action could be taken against the Rulers, those victimised by them and others were afraid to institute action against the royalty.

He rebuked Pas for refusing to support the Bill be-

cause the party, when given a choice between religion and a Ruler, chose the latter.

"Islam for Pas is like a decoration. They use the religion whenever they want to gain mileage.

"The party leaders know that the amendments we are seeking are the right thing since Islam does not provide for anyone to have immunity.

"They are against the Bill because they are afraid of the Sultan of Kelantan."

When interrupted by Opposition Leader Lim Kit Siang (DAP-Tanjong), who wanted to know the Government's stand on whether the Bill needed the consent of the Conference of Rulers, the Prime Minister said the Government always felt that the consent was not necessary.

"We tabled the Bill in Parliament because in the event of a dispute on the validity of the amendments, we were willing to abide by the decision of the courts.

"Since the Conference of Rulers has given the consent, we feel it is a good move as it will help to solve

Pas betrayed claims it voiced, says Ghafar

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the issue amicably."

Later speaking to reporters, Dr Mahathir said the Government was nappy that the issue has been concluded satisfactorily and that it even received the support of the DAP and PBS.

This reflected the aspirations of the rakyat on the matter, he said, adding that this was the first time in a long while that the Government received the support of most of the opposition MPs.

Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Ghafar Baba described Pas' abstention as an example of it practising "half-baked Islam".

"They claim to be the guardians of Islam and have been propagating that in Islam there is no immunity. But when it comes to the crucial moment where they can practise what they preach, they prefer to heed the Sultan of Kelantan instead of Islamic teachings," he told reporters after the Bill was passed.

He said in their hearts they wanted to support the Bill but they could not do so because they feared the wrath of the Sultan.

Welcoming the DAP and PBS' support for the Bill, he said, they should have supported it from the outset.

"If we had waited for the Conference of Rulers to give

its consent as the Opposition had wanted, this issue would never have been solved," he said.

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik expressed satisfaction with the overwhelming support for the Bill.

On DAP's backing the Bill, he said the party was like a "dog running with its tail between its legs" and the issue exposed its "two-faced" stand.

On Pas' abstention, he said the party has advocated that in Islam "no one is above the law" but in this case the party has not demonstrated the principle which it was expected to uphold.

Dr Ling said it was obvious that Pas was more concerned with its politics in Kelantan.

Speaker Tan Sri Mohamed Zahir Ismail said the voting trend was a clear indication of the country's parliamentary democracy in action.

He said the approval of the Bill would perpetuate the peace and harmony that the nation enjoyed.

"Since merdeka, the nation's system of parliamentary democracy has prevailed. The debate on the Bill showed that the principles of democracy was upheld by the MPs since nearly all of them spoke freely."

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