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Dr M: Meeting is valid

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that the first meeting of the 10th Parliament is valid and constitutional.

He added he had every right as the Prime Minister in the caretaker Government at the time to advise the Yang di-Pertuan Agong on the Parliament meeting.

"It does not say in the Constitution that I do not have the authority to advise the King ... the PM in an interim or caretaker Government has the same powers as the PM at other times.

"If I did not have the right to advise the King then, what is the point of having a caretaker Government? Some countries have caretaker Governments for six months," he said when refuting Opposition claims that the meeting had been improperly summoned.

He was speaking at a Press conference at the Parliament lobby after the swearing-in ceremony was disrupted by the Opposition's antics.

Dr Mahathir said he was disappointed and sad that they indulged in "street brawling" at Parliament, without any care for rules and regulations.

He said he tried to explain but they made a lot of noise.

"They did not respect the Speaker and refused to sit when asked to," he said, adding that the Speaker was the one given the authority to arbitrate and make rulings.

The Opposition staged a 90-minute walkout in the midst of the swearing-in ceremony as they claimed the meeting was summoned unconstitutionally.

They based their case on the fact that the King was advised by the Cabinet on the Parliament meeting before it (Cabinet) was formally formed.

"This is not the first time the Opposition has staged a walkout in Parliament, but this is the first time they have done such a thing even before being sworn in."

Dr Mahathir believed that DAP national chairman Lim Kit Siang was the puppetmaster behind the walkout.

This, he said, was because Lim was the first one to bring up the matter. "He no longer has a seat in Parliament and is trying to influence the others.

"If Kit Siang did not bring the issue up, the others - some of whom are new (MPs) - will not bring it up. But he (Lim) pulls the strings, and they follow."

What the Opposition should have done if they were not satisfied with the validity of the meeting, he said, was to forward a motion of objection.

"This can then be debated in accordance to procedure. But they did not do this...when the Speaker said 'sudahlah' and 'duduklah', they did not heed his orders."

Dr Mahathir said the Opposition should give their co-operation to the Government. "This is because we have reached the end of the year and need to approve a Budget for next year.

"Otherwise, we cannot spend money. This is important for the management of the country.

"The Opposition should be co-operative but instead they want to squabble over things like this. They care only of their own interpretation of the regulations."

The reason the Opposition behaved the way they did, the Prime Minister

surmised, was just to "show off their strength".

"They do not understand what is in the Constitution and want to create a disturbance.

"They know this is important. If the Budget (Bill to make provision for expenditure next year) is not passed, we cannot give the people their pay, and this includes the MPs."

The Prime Minister said the Opposition placed greater priority on their role as members of Opposition parties, when they should also be concerned about the country's welfare and interests.

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