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Parliament-Putrajaya

BILL ON FT OF PUTRAJAYA APPROVED WITH TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 11 (Bernama) -- The Dewan Rakyat today approved by a two-thirds majority the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2000 to pave the way for the setting up of the Federal Territory of Putrajaya.

When block voting was conducted at the policy stage, a total of 142 Members of Parliament supported the bill, 27 opposed it and 13 members abstained.

During voting at the committee stage, the bill also received the support of 142 members. However, the number which voted against it was 20 while there were 12 abstentions.

The voting saw the highest turnout at the House with 182 of the 193 MPs present.

Also present were Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who tabled the bill earlier in the day, his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi who wound up the debate, and almost all the ministers, deputy ministers and parliamentary secretaries.

Also present were Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud, Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Seri Panglima Osu Sukam and former deputy prime minister Tun Ghafar Baba. Among those who followed the debate and voting process from the observers gallery were Selangor Exco members Datuk Abdul Fatah Iskandar and Datuk Mohd Shariff Jajang.

When tabling the bill, Dr Mahathir said the federal and Selangor governments made an agreement on July 20, 1995 to create a Federal Government Administrative Centre covering 4,000ha in Sepang District, Selangor, which is now known as Putrajaya.

"According to the agreement, the area is given to the federal government in perpetuity.

"Under the agreement, the Selangor government has delegated to the federal government the conduct of all executive powers needed to enable Putrajaya to be administered as a Federal Government Administrative Centre," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Putrajaya Corporation set up under the Putrajaya Corporation Act 1995 had been given the task to administer and manage Putrajaya on behalf of the federal authorities.

After Putrajaya existed for more than five years in this form, the federal government felt that it was appropriate for Putrajaya to be turned into a Federal Territory with clear and orderly physical, legal and administrative boundaries in order to protect its status as a federal administrative centre, he said.

He said in efforts to make Putrajaya a Federal Territory, a committee chaired by Chief Secretary to the Government and comprising representatives of the relevant ministries and departments was formed.

The committee had held discussions with representatives of the Selangor government led by the Selangor State Secretary, he said.

As a result of the discussions, the federal and Selangor governments signed an agreement on Nov 7 this year which contains the agreement of both sides to turn Putrajaya into a Federal Territory.

Dr Mahathir said since the creation of the Federal Territory of Putrajaya involved changes to the Selangor state boundaries, a law was required to be formulated by Parliament to effect the changes, in line with provisions in Article 2 of the Federal Constitution.

However, Article 2 stipulates that such laws cannot be approved by

Parliament without the agreement of the state of Selangor, as expressed through laws made by the Selangor state legislative body and consent of the Conference of Rulers.

To meet this condition, the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2000 was tabled for first reading in the Dewan Rakyat last Nov 8 and tabled before the Conference of Rulers' meeting on Nov 9.

Dr Mahathir said a draft of the Federal Territory of Putrajaya Bill 2000 for getting the Selangor state's agreement to the boundary changes was also tabled at the same meeting of the Conference of Rulers.

At the meeting, the Conference of Rulers gave its consent for changes to the Selangor state boundaries to enable the creation of the Federal Territory of Putrajaya.

Dr Mahathir said that last Nov 16, the Selangor State Assembly passed the Federal Territory of Putrajaya Bill 2000.

The bill became an enactment when it was assented to by the Regent of Selangor on Nov 27, and the enactment was published in the Selangor state government gazette on Nov 30.

Dr Mahathir said the bill, among other things, contained amendments to Articles 45 and 46 of the Constitution.

The amendment to Article 45 is to enable a Dewan Negara member to be appointed to represent the Federal Territory of Putrajaya, while the amendment to Article 46 is to enable a Dewan Rakyat member to be picked to represent the Federal Territory of Putrajaya.

When winding up the debate, Abdullah said the acquisition of the 4,000ha plot of land did not affect the sovereignty of the state of Selangor, and in fact such a question did not arise.

"This is because Article 2 of the Federal Constitution empowers Parliament to change state boundaries from time to time with the consent of the Malay Rulers and approval of the state assembly concerned," he said.

In the case of Putrajaya, both had given their consent for Putrajaya to be made a Federal Territory, he said.

"This shows that the country practises a system where the Federal Constitution is the supreme law of the land," he said.

Abdullah dismissed allegations that the government took advantage of Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Dr Mohd Khir Toyo who was newly appointed and still "green" in administrative matters to pressure him into agreeing to the Federal Territory proposal.

Abdullah said all processes required to make Putrajaya a Federal Territory had been observed and negotiations on this began in 1999.

"It was also tabled at the Selangor state Exco meeting in the same year when Selangor was led by Datuk Seri Abu Hassan Omar," he said.

He said this proved that the process to take over Putrajaya was not done hastily as talks were held more than a year ago.

At one juncture, Husam Musa (PAS-Kubang Kerian) stood up and said the RM200 million compensation given to Selangor did not at all commensurate with the land value.

Abdullah dismissed his contention, saying RM200 million was no small amount because Selangor obtained many other benefits like development around Putrajaya estimated to cost RM800 million, and development of the Putrajaya new growth centre which will spill over to Negeri Sembilan.

Other benefits include an increase in the number of Selangor representatives in the Putrajaya Corporation from one to two and appreciation in the value of land surrounding the area.

In his debate earlier, Datuk Fadzil Noor (PAS-Pendang) said it would not make sense to maintain Kuala Lumpur as a Federal Territory if Putrajaya was given the same status.

He suggested that amendments to certain acts be made to enable Kuala

Lumpur, which has been a Federal Territory since 1974, to be returned to the Selangor state government.

Fadzil, who had said the opposition would auction Putrajaya if it won the 1999 general election, took the opportunity to change his stand by saying that what would be sold was actually the Prime Minister's residence which he called "Mahligai" (Palace).

Fadzil's statement came under strong fire from government backbenchers because he seemed enthusiastic to safeguard Selangor's sovereignty in this issue and yet was still willing to sell land (Mahligai and Putrajaya) to outsiders.

Datuk Ruhanie Ahmad (BN-Parit Sulong), in his debate, supported the building of Putrajaya as it symbolised a move to establish the country's identity.

Husam suggested that the Datuk Bandar Putrajaya be picked in an election.

The House will sit again tomorrow.

-- BERNAMA

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