

MB: Semangat opposed changes then

KOTA BARU: The PAS-run Kelantan government had wanted to change the state constitution previously but was opposed by its former coalition partner Parti Melayu Semangat 46, Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat said yesterday.

"We kept quiet at that time as we could not reach a consensus with Semangat 46.

"We now have more than two-thirds majority (in the Kelantan State Assembly) and at the PAS muktamar in Kuala Terengganu last year, the party decided we should proceed with the matter," he told reporters after his weekly religious talk at the state PAS headquarters here yesterday.

The two parties, which contested against the Barisan Nasional as Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah in the 1990

general election, went separate ways in 1997 and Semangat 46 was eventually dissolved.

The Kelantan assembly passed the amendment Bill on June 25 sparking off a controversy because the Sultan has yet to give his assent.

Nik Aziz said the state constitution had been amended some 40 times before this.

"For a certain group of people — who are neither PAS nor Umno members — the issue will never be resolved even until doomsday," he added.

The menteri besar said Kelantan was enjoying a period of peace it had not seen before. In the past, he added, fierce bickering between political parties degenerated into a frightful atmosphere.

Former Semangat 46 leader

Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, who is now an Umno supreme council member, has criticised PAS and the state government over the amendments.

He told a gathering on Monday that the Sultan, who is his nephew, had informed him that he (the Sultan) would not sign the Bill.

Reacting to the statement on Wednesday, Nik Aziz had said that the Sultan's refusal to give his assent to the amendment Bill "can jeopardise the Sultan's image as the protector of the people."

Nik Aziz said those who opposed the amendments could refer their grouses to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his "officers" as they had proposed similar amendments to the Federal Constitution in 1983 and 1993.