

Dr M: Next Agong's wish for control over MACC, Petronas raises questions

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Former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad has expressed caution in response to Johor ruler, Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar opining that MACC and Petronas should report directly to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, and not Parliament.

He said that while the Federal Constitution does not provide for this, if what Sultan Ibrahim wants comes true, it will raise serious questions about the role of the Malay rulers as constitutional monarchs.

Sultan Ibrahim will be crowned as the next Agong on Jan 31.

“The (Federal) Constitution and state constitutions have outlined in detail the role, responsibilities and authority of the ruler of each state, as well as the Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

“Before the rulers and Agong's powers were detailed in the Constitution prepared for the independent Federation of Malaya, the rulers were easily forced by the British to surrender their states to the British, and they became rulers without a state.

“To avoid such pressure, the concept of constitutional monarchy was espoused and accepted,” he said.

He added that now pressure must be put on Parliament to ensure that only when the legislature and the monarchy agree can a new law, policy, or decision be made.

“Separation of powers between the two is better than absolute power,” he said.

‘Report to me’

Sultan Ibrahim had expressed a want for control over the MACC and Petronas during an interview with Singapore's The Straits Times published on Sunday.

Regarding the MACC, the future king said royal authority over the graftbuster would ensure its independence.

“If it comes to the Agong, it means you are not under the influence of anybody from the executive.

“Even Petronas shouldn't be under Parliament, report directly to me,” the state ruler said.

The anti-graft agency and the state oil and gas company currently report to the government, not Parliament.

Sultan Ibrahim also opined that the Conference of Rulers had a greater role in the appointment of judges without executive interference.

In November 2022, the Conference of Rulers said that the Judicial Appointments Committee (JAC) should be independent of the executive.

However, in the decree, the rulers said that the five slots to be appointed by the prime minister should instead be entrusted to other institutions such as the Bar Council, Sabah Law Society, Advocates Association of Sarawak and Parliament's select committee.

Mahathir has a tenuous relationship with the Johor royal family, having frequently traded barbs with both Sultan Ibrahim and Crown Prince Tunku Ismail.

This includes a dispute over Forest City, a struggling megaproject the Johor ruler has a major stake in.

The Johor ruler, meanwhile, played a key role in turning public sentiment against Mahathir's government in 2019 for signing the Rome Statute.

The animosity between Mahathir and the Johor monarchy dates back to the early 1990s when Mahathir's government then removed royal immunity from prosecution over a controversy involving the Johor royals.

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