

Govt awaits Conference of Rulers' nod on chief justice

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he is waiting for approval from the Conference of Rulers on the appointment of the new chief justice.

He said there was a provision stating that the appointment of a chief justice must be submitted to the Conference of Rulers and not just to Yang di-Pertuan Agong Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah.

"We have informed the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, but there is (also) a need to inform other rulers.

"That is being done now, and we are waiting for the approval."

Tan Sri Richard Malanjum retired on April 12 after serving 27 years in the judiciary.

Malanjum, the first Sabahan to hold the judiciary's top post, served as chief justice for nine months, and 12 years as the chief

judge of Sabah and Sarawak.

Asked about his meeting with newly-appointed Johor Menteri Besar Dr Sahrudin Jamal recently, Dr Mahathir said there was nothing extraordinary about it.

"*Orang baru* (new person). It is just a normal meeting"

The meeting was held amid speculation that two Johor executive council members would be dropped from the new line-up.

It was reported that Dr Sahrudin was expected to finalise the new executive council line-up by the end of the week.

Commenting on a research conducted by multinational investment bank and financial services company Morgan Stanley on Malaysia's position in the FTSE World Government Bond Index (WGBI), Dr Mahathir said the country had no plans to withdraw from the bond market.

Morgan Stanley, in a research note, said Malaysia could see outflows of almost US\$8 billion if its bonds were downgraded by global index provider FTSE Russell.

On Monday, FTSE said it would review Malaysia's market accessibility level in the WGBI due to concerns about market liquidity.

Malaysia is currently assigned a "2" and has been included in the WGBI since 2004.

FTSE said Malaysia was being considered for a potential downgrade to "1", making it ineligible for inclusion in the WGBI.

Dr Mahathir said he was baffled by rating agencies' move to downgrade Malaysia over its move to rescue and resolve problems involving beleaguered government-linked companies.

"This is strange... when it was announced that Malaysia owed RM1.3 trillion (in debt), there was

no talk about downgrading.

"I suppose rating agencies have their own set of criteria.

"However, it is a fact that the previous government owed huge sums of money that would cause deficit in the budgets for many years to come."

He said the Pakatan Harapan administration had helped the nation make huge savings.

This was by resolving investment problems and issues involving the East Coast Rail Link project, Felda, Tabung Haji and the Bandar Malaysia project.

Meanwhile, Bernama reported that Dr Mahathir had assured Tabung Haji depositors that their money would be properly managed by the Pakatan Harapan government.

He said TH had been ill-managed over the years, resulting in the fund not making much profit.

"Actually, they are not making any money. So they take the deposit and pay as dividends. So a lot of people keep their money there because they see a lot of returns from the investments.

"This cannot go on forever."

He said to ensure people continued to keep their money in TH, the government would pay dividends to depositors using returns from investments it made, even though the amount might be small.

"This means people who want to perform the hajj will still be willing to put money (in TH) because it will be well managed, not like before, where the deposits were used to subsidise pilgrimage and declare dividends."

Early this month, TH announced dividend distribution for 2018 at the rate of 1.25 per cent, the lowest in its history.