

Dr M upset over withdrawal from Rome Statute

PUTRAJAYA: Malaysia will not be ratifying the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) - a month after acceding to the treaty.

Announcing the Cabinet's latest decision, a visibly upset Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the government "was forced" to withdraw following confusion created by those with political interests.

The Prime Minister said contrary to claims, signing the Rome Statute was not harmful nor would it affect the country's sovereignty.

"The Cabinet this morning made a decision to withdraw our ratifica-

tion of the Statute of Rome. It is not because it is harmful to the country but because of politics where people are easily misled by emotional claims that what this government is doing is against our own interest," he said at a special press conference here yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had until June to withdraw and would do so by then.

On March 4, Malaysia signed an instrument to accede to the Rome Statute of the ICC.

The ICC is the first permanent, treaty-based international criminal

court. Its objective is to end impunity against perpetrators of the most serious crimes - genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes of aggression.

Only individuals and not the country would be taken to task.

Asked why the decision to ratify was not raised in Parliament first, the Prime Minister said this was not necessary because the government did not want to be excessive in exercising its power.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia would not be affected by the statute because the government had no

intention to commit crimes such as genocide or other excessive acts.

He pointed out that Myanmar did not sign the statute but was internationally condemned over its mistreatment of the Rohingya.

Asked why he looked upset over the decision, Dr Mahathir said this was an attempt to undermine the government and him as Prime Minister.

"I see this as a way to blacken my image. They know they cannot oust me easily so they have to paint a bleak picture of me," he said.

During the press conference, the

Prime Minister alluded several times to the involvement of royalty behind protests towards the ratification.

Without naming them, Dr Mahathir pointed out the hypocrisy of his detractors, saying that they were silent over Datuk Seri Najib Razak's "misrule".

"The cowards saw Najib stealing money and said nothing. They wanted to benefit from Najib's misrule. Who they are you can guess," he said.

The Prime Minister warned that even without ratifying the statute, no one in this country was above the law.