

Dr M and Muhyiddin fire salvos at former colleagues

PETALING JAYA: The issue of "collective responsibility" was brought to the fore as Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad squared off with three former ministers over the Batu Puteh issue, with his sentiment echoed by Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, also then a minister when the contentious decision was made.

Dr Mahathir said it is perplexing that the three former ministers during his second premiership did not raise objections when he informed the Cabinet of the decision not to pursue sovereignty rights over Batu Puteh.

"Wouldn't they know that they could state their views or perspectives without me telling them to do so?"

"Secondly if my decision was

wrong or they did not agree with it, why is it that no objection or views were raised after I informed them?"

"Are they saying that informing them of the decision was a hindrance to them raising objections, debating the issue or agreeing to it?" said the former prime minister in a statement through his lawyer Rafique Rashid yesterday.

Dr Mahathir was responding to the joint statement earlier yesterday issued by Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, Datuk Seri Mohamad Sabu and Anthony Loke that he had informed them of the Batu Puteh decision during a Cabinet meeting on May 23, 2018, after deciding on it two days prior to that.

The three said Dr Mahathir,

then the prime minister, had conveyed the decision to the Singapore government through the Solicitor General before that Cabinet meeting.

"Don't they know any issues raised should have the attention of every Cabinet member and if there had any views they should bring (them) forth during the meeting?"

"The question is, do they know what collective responsibility is all about as a Cabinet member?"

"As far as I know, all three agreed to the decision after I put forward in detail my perspective on the issue," said Dr Mahathir.

He added that it is baffling that none of them had spoken of it since 2018, but avoided responsibility after he told what had transpired.

The nonagenarian has denied the recently released findings of the Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCI), which said he was responsible for losing the sovereignty of Batu Puteh to Singapore, an act described by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as treacherous.

After Dr Mahathir's statement yesterday, Muhyiddin followed up with a statement to defend the elder leader, saying that he should not bear the full responsibility for the matter.

Muhyiddin, currently the Perikatan Nasional chairman and Bersatu president, said when the Cabinet has decided, it is "each of its ministers' responsibility to accept the decision collectively. The issue of treason does not arise".

"In fact, bringing a former prime minister to court over a government decision that was approved by the Cabinet during the previous administration will set a bad precedent," said Muhyiddin, the home minister during Mahathir's second premiership.

Muhyiddin reminded Dr Wan Azizah, Mohamad and Loke that they shared a collective responsibility for the issue as Cabinet ministers at the time.

In a highly redacted and declassified report tabled in Parliament on Dec 5, the RCI has recommended investigations over the loss of Batu Puteh.

It also recommended that the RCI secretary lodge a police report to initiate a probe against Dr Mahathir.