

Rakan Muda: Kelantan has no right to stop students

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the Kelantan Government had no right to stop students and youths from participating in the Rakan Muda programme.

Speaking to reporters at Parliament lobby this afternoon, he said the rejection of the programme by the State Government would force students and youths to leave the State due to the lack of avenues for them to address their problems.

Asked on steps to be taken by the Federal Government for those who were interested in the programme, Dr Mahathir said assistance would be given to them.

"The State Government has no right to stop students from participating in the Rakan Muda. We will continue with whatever programmes possible... the only thing we will not get is their co-operation."

Dr Mahathir said the Kelantan Government had merely stated its willingness to extend its co-operation but "whenever we do something beneficial, they were not willing".

Asked whether the rejection reflected the Kelantan Government's confrontational attitude, he said the decision was regrettable.

"Although we hold different views in politics, there is no reason to stop us from finding solutions to problems encountered."

Kelantan Islamic Development, Education and Missionary Committee chairman Muhamad Daud said yesterday the State Government did not encourage the participation of students in the State in the Rakan Muda programme.

He claimed the programme had more negative elements like participants of opposite sexes mixing freely compared with posi-

tive ones.

A verbal directive has also been issued to schools under the administration of Yayasan Islam Kelantan to restrain their students from participating in activities under the programme.

Dr Mahathir called on the Kelantan Government to point out the things they considered un-Islamic under the programme so that these could be rectified.

"Tell us which one is not Islamic... those considered un-Islamic under their interpretation, they do not have to use."

Dr Mahathir said it was known that the Pas-led Kelantan Government had used mosques for its political ends.

In Shah Alam, Youth and Sports Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said the Kelantan Government was afraid of the Rakan Muda programme as it feared participating youths would support the Barisan Nasional.

He said the decision was unreasonable and would deny youths benefits of the programme.

Despite this, he said some 85,000 youths in the State had already signed up for various activities under the programme.

"The Pas Government should be more open minded and not too suspicious as the programme has been formulated for the benefit of all youths irrespective of race and religion."

"There are 10 ways of life promoted under the programme and at least a few of them will suit any particular group of youths," he told reporters after opening a seminar on improving sports facilities at Mara Institute of Technology here.

Some 100 participants attended the three-day seminar jointly organised by ITM and the Youth and Sports Ministry.

Muhyiddin said it was obvious that the State Government did not fully understand the programme for claiming some aspects of it

were against Islam.

He said the programme did not only promote a clean and healthy way of life but also inculcate values.

"If it is perceived as promoting values contrary to Islamic teachings like allowing participants of different sexes to mix freely, then the fault lies not with the programme but with those who implement it," he said.

Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib also called on the Kelantan Government to review its decision.

He said they should not be too hasty in rejecting the programme, sacrificing the future of youths in the State because of political differences.

In Seremban, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman described the rejection as politically-motivated.

"They reject it simply because it was initiated by the Federal Government. There is no other reason behind it," he said.

He said the State Government had failed to understand the aims of the programme designed to benefit youths, who made up 62 per cent of the nation's population.

"It is tailored to produce youths who have the resilience to overcome any challenges and also to mobilise them towards contributing effectively in nation building," he said after attending the first meeting of the national-level Quran Reciters Assembly main committee meeting here.

Abdul Hamid said Rakan Muda encompasses a wide scope including religion as evident by the launching of Rakan Masjid (Friends of the Mosques), aimed at bringing youths closer to religion.

He said Pas was targeting youths as the prime target in its membership drive and party's leaders felt Rakan Muda could hamper their efforts.