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Mahathir-Language

PM: DON'T TURN USE OF BAHASA FOR CHRISTIAN PAMPHLETS INTO POLITICAL ISSUE

SUNGAI PETANI, March 18 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today advised Muslims not to turn the use of the National Language in Christian religious pamphlets into a political issue.

"I'm concerned that people will make it an issue and question why Christians are issuing pamphlets in the National Language... turning it into an issue to the extent of souring relations between Muslims and non-Muslims," he said.

He was speaking when launching the Kedah level "Gerak Mesra" programme at the Mara Skills Institute here. Some 5,000 people attended the function, the first at state level, organised by the Information Ministry.

It is learnt that such pamphlets were distributed to the public in Kuala Lumpur recently.

Dr Mahathir said Muslims need not be alarmed over the use of the National Language in such pamphlets and play up the matter.

The pamphlets were distributed with the aim of providing information to non-Christians wishing to deepen their knowledge of the religion.

He said: "We Muslims don't have to learn it, there's no need to take it seriously. If they want to distribute the pamphlets it's up to them... nothing to do with us.

"I acknowledge that the National Language originated from the Malay Language and is now the National Language.

"However, when we make it the National Language, it's the right of others to learn and use it... for themselves, not for us."

Dr Mahathir said the pamphlets were probably for other races, like the Chinese and Iban communities, whose children were more fluent in the National Language than in their mother tongue.

The use of the National Language in such pamphlets would not erode the faith of Muslims if they remained resolute to Islam, he added.

Dr Mahathir cited the example of his father who studied in an English School despite the notion held by the Malays at that time that a person would be converted to Christianity if they studied English.

"My father was among the Malay boys who studied at the St Xavier's in Penang. He learnt the English Language and did not become a Christian," he said.

"He went and studied there to acquire knowledge and enhance his position as an English Language teacher. He returned to Alor Setar and opened an English School and many Malays learnt English... (they) did not become Christians."

Dr Mahathir said if learning the language (English) would make one deviate from his religion then this did not happen to his father.

He said he did not read Christian religious books. "Even if I read, it's only to see how far it differed from Islam after I have a deeper knowledge of Islam."

There was nothing wrong if the National Language was used in the Christian pamphlets and Malays would have to accept it with an open mind, he added.

"Let's not raise this matter and turn it into a political issue to the extent of harming racial and religious relations in this country," he said.

-- BERNAMA

MFJ AAM LDB