

03/09/1997

Education best way to handle religious matters

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - All State mufti today were informed that the most suitable approach in the handling of religious matters is through formal and informal education and not force.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman said this after the mufti met Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, at the Prime Minister's Department this afternoon.

The mufti were briefed on why the Government had to be careful when enforcing Syariah laws in view of Malaysia's multi-racial society.

Speaking to reporters following the closed-door 2 1/2-hour meeting, Abdul Hamid said the meeting had cleared all doubts and confusion that the Government was trying to undermine the mufti's powers.

Citing some of the Friday sermons which were critical of the Government and Dr Mahathir, he said the purported conflict between the Prime Minister and the mufti was found to have been manipulated and politicised by a certain Opposition party.

"We discovered that the mosques involved were those which use the service of invited khatib (those who deliver the sermons) who disregarded the texts prepared by the State religious councils."

The problem, Abdul Hamid said, was widespread in the Federal Territory where 12 mosques had been identified as having been used by certain groups to discredit the Prime Minister.

He said the mufti, sad that Dr Mahathir was subjected to false accusations, had agreed to counter this through religious talks and Friday sermons.

Abdul Hamid also said Dr Mahathir explained that the Government had never questioned the Syariah laws and fatwa issued by the mufti.

He said the Prime Minister also reiterated the Government's moderate stand in handling religious matters.

He said the meeting agreed that the parties - the mufti and ulama and the Government - needed each other.

"Dr Mahathir also reiterated that it has always been the goal of the Government to strengthen and enhance the position of the mufti as the main authority on religious issues."

Abdul Hamid said the mufti had also agreed to refer fatwa (religious ruling) matters to the National Fatwa Committee to ensure uniformity.

They have also agreed to a review of the fatwa procedure and administration of Syariah laws, with the aim of enhancing efficiency.

The decision will be conveyed to the Conference of Rulers at its next meeting at the end of the year.

Also present were Terengganu Menteri Besar Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad, Umno Information chief Datuk Dr Yusof Nor and Melor Assemblyman Datuk Zainal Abidin Abdul Kadir.

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