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Mahathir-mufti

GOVT NOT OUT TO USURP MUFTIS, SAYS MAHATHIR

By: Azman Hashim

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 28 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the government has no intention of curbing the activities of muftis in the country.

But at the same time it would not hesitate to act against muftis who slander others or abuse their powers, he told Bernama.

The prime minister said that after the passing of Prophet Muhammad, muftis were appointed to issue fatwa (rulings) to avoid confusion arising from so many people coming up with their own fatwa.

But, he said, certain procedures have to be observed in issuing a fatwa as abided by muftis during the times after the demise of prophet Muhammad.

Dr Mahathir was approached on the mufti and other current national issues after recording his 40th National Day message at Angkasapuri here today.

Malaysia celebrates her national day on Sunday.

The prime minister said the government empowered muftis to issue ruling so that no other parties would take upon themselves to do just that.

He said the powers of the mufti were not meant to be abused to issue fatwa at will by bypassing set procedures.

"But it appears that there are muftis who go about making speeches. There is one politically-inclined mufti who delivers anti-government speeches," he said.

He described such muftis, whose salaries are paid by the government, as having abused their powers by making anti-government speeches.

Dr Mahathir said there were also muftis who slandered the government for its moderate stand in enforcing Syaria (Islamic laws).

Dr Mahathir said there were muftis who claimed that by being moderate the government meant that Muslims should only pray thrice daily as against the mandatory five times.

"Who says this? This is slander," the prime minister said.

He said the government would act against muftis who slandered.

Slandering is an unIslamic, he said, and a mufti who flouted Islamic teachings no longer qualified to be one.

At a press conference after an Umno supreme council meeting early this month, Dr Mahathir announced that the government had decided to review the enforcement of the Syaria in the country as well as the role and jurisdiction of muftis and religious officials.

But, the opposition PAS, through the party tabloid "Harakah" had branded the prime minister's announcement as a government move to usurp the powers of the muftis.

Dr Mahathir said as human beings, government leaders were open to criticisms by any mufti who carried out his responsibility according to procedures.

"There's no problem with Muftis who perform their duties well. But then muftis are also normal beings and it doesn't mean they are inviolable," he said.

He said the government would reprimand errant muftis and act against those who have committed offences.

Dr Mahathir said the government's objective in reprimanding muftis who often made statements was to ensure that Muslims were not confused by the views of a mufti on a certain matter with the actual fatwa on the particular issue.

"When a mufti replies to a query, that is not a fatwa (ruling). But many people will regard it as one. A fatwa is issued through a discerning process, by referring to experts and is then approved by the authority empowered to deal with religious matters," he said.

The prime minister said the government also had to caution muftis who gave views outside their area of expertise without consulting the real experts in particular fields.

By doing so the way they did, their views could be mistaken as fatwa, he said.

"For example. A mufti without medical knowledge should refer to a medical expert," Dr Mahathir said.

The government's present predicament was that muftis, when asked on a certain matter, made statements without referring to anyone and spoke as if they were issuing fatwa.

"This, we must caution them against. If we don't, we're at fault," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he would raise the question of muftis issuing fatwa and their role at his meeting with them scheduled for Tuesday.

"We'll tell them (the muftis) we want to maintain a blissful life for Muslims who should not be confused by muftis with political interests. This is the problem," the prime minister added. -- Bernama

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