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Mahathir-Mufti

MUFTI AGREE TO COORDINATE FATWA PROCEDURE

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 2 (Bernama) -- All mufti in the country today agreed to coordinate fatwa procedure and administration of Syariah laws in their respective states.

The decision was reached at a two-and-half hour meeting between all the state mufti and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the Prime Minister's Department here.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman said that the decision would be conveyed to the Conference of Rulers at its meeting at the end of the year.

Dr Abdul Hamid said that the meeting was held in a very cordial atmosphere.

"All the mufti highly appreciated the meeting...now all confusions have been cleared and there is no question of the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and the government challenging the mufti," he said.

Hamid said the meeting also agreed that the government's intention was to enhance the muftis' position as the main source of reference and authority in issuing fatwas (religious rulings).

He, however, said the muftis had no jurisdiction to administer the Syariah Laws.

Therefore, the government did not questioned the fatwas and Islamic rulings issued by muftis.

He also said the meeting agreed to restructure the fatwa procedures and the administration of the Syariah Laws so that they could be streamlined nationwide.

Hamid said among the aspects to be streamlined are the fatwas decided by the State Fatwa Committees (chaired by State Muftis) were not final but need to be referred to the State Islamic Religious Affairs Council in which the mufti is also a member.

He said the fatwa would then be proposed to the state government, forwarded to the Sultan before being gazetted.

Hamid said at present there were differences between the states and the Federal Territory where the latter had full powers to issue fatwas, gazette and revoke them.

With regards to the administration of Syariah Laws, he said, the administration of the State Islamic Affairs Departments and Syariah Courts would be coordinated particularly enforcement aspects.

He said the confusion arose from a misinterpretation of the statement made by Dr Mahathir on the people vested with powers did not know how to use it when he commented on the arrest of three Muslim beauty contestants in Selangor recently.

Hamid clarified that Dr Mahathir did not meant the muftis but instead the enforcement officers.

" But certain groups deliberately twisted his statement as if Dr Mahathir challenged the muftis which was later blown out of proportion," he said.

" Some muftis were sad Dr Mahathir was subjected to such accusations following the confusion," he said.

Following today's meeting, Hamid said, the muftis agreed to clear the confusion through Friday sermons and religious talks.

In deciding fatwas, the muftis agreed to take into account the

interests of Muslims in the country as Malaysia was now borderless in respect to the people's movements.

In this regard, the National Fatwa Committee would play a crucial role to discuss cases referred to them by the State Islamic Religious Affairs Council, he said.

When asked for details on the criticisms hurled at Dr Mahathir, he said, 12 mosques in the Federal Territory were identified to be used by certain groups to discredit the Prime Minister.

He said the Islamic Development Department sent its khatibs (sermon readers) to the mosques to clarify the matter.

He said all 14 state muftis attended the meeting.

Also present were Terengganu Menteri Besar Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad, Umno Information chief Datuk Dr Yusof Nor, Melor assemblyman from Kelantan Datuk Haji Zainal Abidin Abdul Kadir. -- BERNAMA

AFY/MNY TS