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PM to hold meeting with muftis

IPOH, Sat. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will meet all State muftis on Tuesday to discuss their role in the administration of Islamic laws and the issuing of fatwas (rulings).

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman, said the meeting would also discuss the differences in the implementation of Syariah laws in each State, including the administrative, enforcement, legal, judiciary and fatwa aspects of the Syariah laws.

He said the meeting was needed because the Government had decided to review the enforcement of the Syariah laws and the role and jurisdiction of mufti and religious officials.

He, however, said it was not the Government's intention to curb the role and activities of the muftis but to ensure that the fatwa was implemented within the mainstream of the Government and also that the fatwa would not be abused.

He said this after opening the State level religious teachers' seminar today.

Dr Mahathir said yesterday in Kelantan that the Government would propose to the Rulers that any fatwa by the mufti be referred to a special committee not headed by a mufti to enable the members to discuss the fatwa before enforcing it.

Currently a mufti, as in the case of the Federal Territory, is also the chairman of the special committee to study the fatwa.

Abdul Hamid said the Government would not stop the mufti from issuing fatwas but the implementation and when it should be enforced must be left to the Government.

This was to ensure that certain procedures were observed in issuing fatwas so that their implementation would not paint a negative image of the religion.

"The Government also does not want implementation of the fatwas to stray from the mainstream of Islamic teachings within the Government's administration," he said.

Abdul Hamid said although fatwas issued were in accordance with Islamic laws, some could not be implemented now as it would confuse the people.

Citing an example, he said there was a fatwa on compulsory Friday prayers and what clothes Islamic women were allowed to wear, but this was not enforced because Muslims were aware of their responsibilities.

Abdul Hamid also said the Government did not question the knowledge and wisdom of the mufti but that certain procedures were needed to ensure that Islamic laws were not misinterpreted.

Earlier in his speech, Abdul Hamid said the Government would study the role of religious teachers, particularly "guru takmir" (religious teachers who hold classes in mosques after prayers).

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