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Religious education content, teaching means to be reviewed

THE Government will review the content of the educational system and the method of presentation of the Islamic teachings to develop a strong personal defence to eradicate the social ills plaguing Muslims in the country.

Concerned with the current state of the social problems among Muslims in the country, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government has to study whether the present method of disseminating Islamic teachings is not effective.

"Some people have strong religious foundations and some may not ... So, we want to know the reasons," he told reporters after attending a special meeting with representatives of religious units of government agencies nationwide to discuss social ills within the Muslim community.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman were present at the meeting attended also by other Cabinet ministers, Menteris Besar, politicians and social activists.

Dr Mahathir was asked whether the educational system has been ineffective in building the inner strength among Muslims to fight the social ills that are plaguing the Muslims in the country.

"It is not the failure of the system. Maybe, it is the failure of the content ... Is it enough just to teach others how to pray and perform religious activities?" he asked.

Dr Mahathir said religious scholars and instructors should also stress on how a Muslim should lead his life, including giving priority to working and studying diligently.

"The religious education system in schools might be stressing too much on the ritual aspects that tends to neglect those which could help build a strong personal character.

On the meeting itself, Dr Mahathir said the participants discussed the social problems facing the Muslims in the country and explored ways to solve the issues.

"It is to get them understand the problem and also to find ways and means to overcome the problem ... to launch a campaign actually, to fight against the spread of social ills among the Muslims in the country," he added.

Asked on the steps taken to overcome the social ills, Dr Mahathir said they did not discuss it specifically.

"This is just an information function and meeting to get feedback on the opinions of the participants. After this, we will do a follow-up to the suggestions or recommendations discussed during the meeting," he added.

Dr Mahathir said during the dialogue, many of the participants considered parents play an important role in guiding their children.

"Some also felt advisers also played an important role in providing advice to couples intending to set up a family life. The role is not merely on the teacher but everybody have a role to play.

"We cannot say only those with power can do it. That is why I stress that we should not think that we do not have the power."

Asked whether the move requiring operators to close entertainment outlets such as pubs and discos by 1am will be extended to other states, Dr Mahathir said.

"There has yet to be any permanent regulation on the matter. We are

merely advising them. The respective state should implement the action," he added.

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