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Syariah laws: Rulers want study on uniformity

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The Rulers' Conference has agreed that there should be a uniform implementation of Syariah laws in all States but only after a study has been conducted by a committee under the Prime Minister's Department.

The Sultan of Perak, who was the Lord President before ascending the Perak throne, will be the adviser to the committee.

"The committee will study all aspects of the implementation and enforcement of Syariah laws," Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told reporters after launching the Indy 40 Enduro go-kart race and receiving the challenge trophy - the Prime Minister's Cup - at the Regent Hotel.

Syariah laws had for decades been implemented differently in various States, especially on penalties for those who violate regulations on behaviour and marriage.

The most recent controversy is the one surrounding three part-time models who participated in the Miss Malaysia Petite 1997 pageant in Selangor. They were charged under section 31 of the State Islamic Crime Enactment for dressing indecently.

The three were also charged in the Shah Alam Syariah High Court with going against a fatwa (Islamic ruling) of the Selangor Mufti, prohibiting Muslim women from taking part in beauty contests.

The case prompted Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who was acting Prime Minister during Dr Mahathir's absence, to call for moderation in the implementation of Syariah laws.

Asked whether the findings would be presented at the next Rulers' Conference, Dr Mahathir said: "Not necessarily the next Rulers' Conference ... we will try to do it as soon as possible."

Last Tuesday, Dr Mahathir, on returning home from his two-month leave, had said the proposal on the implementation of uniform Syariah laws would be raised at the Rulers' Conference.

Dr Mahathir said Kedah, which was not a member of the Rulers' Committee on Religious Affairs, had opted to wait for the findings before making a decision.

But Pahang, also not a member of the Rulers' Committee, had agreed to the proposal, he said.

"The agreement by the Rulers' Conference would make it easier for the uniform implementation of Syariah laws," he said, "but they are not applicable to non-Muslims. We will not force the laws on them."

The Rulers' Conference also discussed national policies, appointments and religious matters during the two-day meeting which ended today.

The Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Ja'afar attended the 176th meeting today accompanied by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

The Keeper of the Rulers' Seal, in a statement later, said the Sultan of Kedah chaired the meeting but did not elaborate.

All the Malay Rulers were present except for the Sultan of Pahang, the Raja of Perlis, the Sultan of Johor and the Sarawak Yang di-Pertua Negeri.

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