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Mahathir-Religion

SYARIAH LAWS NOT IN LINE WITH ISLAMIC TEACHINGS TO BE REPEALED

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 8 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said syariah laws enacted by states that are inconsistent with Islamic teachings will be repealed while the role and jurisdiction of officials responsible with Islamic affairs will be clarified.

The Prime Minister said this was to ensure that syariah laws are correctly administered in the country and because Islamic law is fair and does not victimise anyone.

"We will repeal laws that are inconsistent with Islamic teachings, and Islamic teachings do not tell us to act in an extreme manner and victimise Muslims.

"Sometimes the focus is on such matters (implementing the law) and it does not correct Muslims and lead them to the right path, but instead it causes split among Muslims and weaken them.

"We can call it a reformation (of syariah laws) but the important thing is that we carry out a review because there has been misintepretations of the authority (given to religious officials) such as muftis," he told reporters after chairing an Umno Supreme Council meeting at the party headquarters here.

Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, said a committee set up to standardise the implementation of syariah laws in the country will also review the laws that are inconsistent with Islamic teachings and clarify the role and jurisdiction of religious officials.

The Prime Minister said the supreme council discussed the matter at length because there are certain groups now that claim themselves to be ulamas and that whatever they say cannot be rejected by others, and there are also muftis who issue fatwas as they like.

He said a mufti is given the authority to issue fatwas, but only when there is confusion in intepreting specific Islamic teaching and the matter is referred to him. It is not the mufti's right to issue fatwas as he likes.

Dr Mahathir said there are certain syariah laws in the states that give muftis the authority to issue fatwas and revoke fatwas.

He said muftis should only issue fatwas after discussing with a panel comprising learned persons, and they need not just be learned in the Islamic field.

The Prime Minister said the government will see that the committee issuing fatwas also includes women representatives because their views must also be considered to ensure fairness.

He also said that fatwas issued by muftis need not become laws until they are gazetted by state governments.

On the membership of the committee that will review the syariah laws, Dr Mahathir said it will consist of learned people from various fields.

Asked who will head the committee, he said: "There is one name - Dr Mahathir".

He said while awaiting the review to be completed, state religious councils should defer the implementation of laws that may raise questions so as to ensure that Muslims are not victimised.

Dr Mahathir also referred to the recent move by the Selangor Islamic Religious Council to arrest and prosecute three Muslim girls who took part in a beauty contest.

"Although we (Umno) agree that there should not be beauty contests

involving Muslims the way we stop that is through advise. Islam itself requires us not to always use force but instead advise people in correcting wrongdoings," he said.

On the possibility that the move to review syariah laws will be turned into a political issue by opposition parties, Dr Mahathir said Umno will not be surprised if PAS did so.

"We believe it will be made a political issue because these people (PAS members) do not hold on to their religion... but only to their political party." he said.

The Prime Minister said what Umno was trying to do was to ensure that the image of Islam is not tarnished by extreme actions. -- BERNAMA

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