

29 JUL 1999

Mahathir-Ulama

I'M NOT ANTI-ULAMA, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA TERENGGANU, July 29 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he is not anti-ulamas (Islamic scholars) as alleged by the opposition.

He said he only wanted to draw the difference between genuine ulamas and politically motivated individuals who claimed they are ulamas.

"We don't reject ulamas, what we said is that who are the ulamas... it's not true and a blatant lie if they say that I'm anti-ulamas," he said.

Dr Mahathir said this when asked to clarify his stand on the matter during a dialogue with federal and state government officers at Wisma Darul Iman here today.

The prime minister is on a two-day working visit to Terengganu.

Becoming an ulama was not easy and not all people could be recognised as ulamas, he said.

One does not become an ulama by holding a bachelor's degree in religious studies or by joining an ulamas' association, he said.

"What I said was it's not easy to become an ulama, not just any one with a BA degree... I did not reject ulamas but I want to know which one is (the genuine ulama)," he said.

The prime minister said he could not just accept individuals who joined a so-called ulama association while their speeches were not at all based on the knowledge of an ulama.

He said a genuine ulama has no other interests other than the desire to solely and neutrally interpret religion.

"The moment he makes interpretations along political and party line, I'll distrust him.

"For that matter I accept people like Imam Bukhori as ulama...I don't reject him," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he could not accept all the people who called themselves ulamas, more so, when they readily claimed they were "the prophet's descendants".

"We have to pick those who merit being called ulamas," he said.

The prime minister said for him to recognise a person as an ulama, he would have to know whether that person was qualified or not to be accorded the title ulama because an ulama commands a high position in society.

"We accept ulamas, in fact I also accept the view that ulamas are descendants of the prophets but not all who claim they are ulamas.

"I shall only accept as ulamas those who don't take sides...those who only want to propagate the religion. It's totally untrue and a lie to say that I'm anti-ulama..this is a lie..," he said.

The prime said that as a case in point he could not accept chief of PAS' council of scholars and Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat as an ulama because Nik Aziz stated that "even God uses profanities" out of wanting to defend PAS life-member and national laureate Prof Datuk Shahnun Ahmad who used obscene words in the novel "Shit".

During the dialogue the prime minister was also asked about civil servants refusing to implement government policies or directives.

Dr Mahathir said he would leave it to the heads of department to remind their subordinates about their obligations as government servants as spelt out in the terms of their employment.

If they still chose to ignore the reminders they could face disciplinary action, he said.

"If they still don't comply, disciplinary action has to be taken," he said.

Civil servants were duty-bound to implement government policies in order for the country to develop.

"What'll happen to the country if civil servants disobey government instructions. Obviously we can't develop the country," he said.

Staffers should not renege on their pledge to follow and carry out government policies as long as they are in the civil service, he said.

The prime minister described civil servants who did not live up to their pledge as government betrayers.

Dr Mahathir said whether civil servants would vote or not for the government was a different matter altogether.

But as government servants, they would have to abide by the directives on implementing policies of the administration, he said.

"If they have divergent views...there's nothing more we can say about that but so long as they're in the government, they must fulfil their obligations (as government servants)," he said.

Menteri Besar Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad and Information Minister Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob were also present.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, held a closed-door meeting with the Terengganu Umno liaison committee at the same venue.

-- BERNAMA

SN KHY RYN