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`Schools to be taken over to help students'

SEREMBAN, Thurs. - The Federal Government wants to take over the administration of State-run public religious schools to improve pupils' academic performance and free them from being influenced to be anti-establishment.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the Government decided on the matter after having observed their administration for quite some time.

"What is wrong with us taking over these schools as we want them to be properly managed while improving the performance of pupils," he said at a dialogue with civil servants.

"These schools have been poorly managed while the teachers do not emphasise quality education. They merely need the fees to pay the teachers," Dr Mahathir said.

He was asked on the rationale behind the Federal Government's intention to take over these schools.

The Prime Minister said some of the teachers were also found to have indoctrinated the pupils to hate the Government and support a certain political party.

He denied claims that the proposed take-over was to influence the pupils to support the (Barisan Nasional) Government and to hate the Opposition.

"It is the Government's responsibility to ensure that pupils of these schools excel in their studies until they go to the highest possible level. We have no time nor the intention to poison their minds."

On the possibility of enforcing Hudud law in the country under the "present scenario", he said from his own reference to the Quran and religious books, Islam emphasised fairness.

Hudud law proposed by Pas, he said, was not in accordance with the true Islamic teaching.

Dr Mahathir said certain quarters were trying to put the Federal Government in a difficult situation by raising the issue.

"We ought to know that this country comprises people of various races and different religions. Therefore, it is not possible to implement the law on non-Muslims," he said, adding that the Government did not want to politicise the matter.

"I am not afraid if there are people who say I am being unIslamic (over this issue). In fact, my stand is very Islamic," he said.

To a question on the grievances of people over the lack of development in their areas, Dr Mahathir said the Government had been doing its best to improve their living standard.

He said he was aware that any decision by the Government could not possibly satisfy everyone.

"However, we must learn to be grateful for what we have," he said, adding that the people should compare their condition with that of those in some other developing countries.

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