

No decision on Apostasy Bill yet, says Dr M

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues: There has been no decision on the move to formulate the Apostasy Bill as discussions on the matter are continuing, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says.

He said the government does not wish to act in haste, as it will result in a disincentive to the non-Muslims to embrace the religion. "Accordingly, the religion will not be able to spread among the non-Muslims.

"Since we need a decision on this matter, we choose not to do anything yet at the

moment as it is not solved yet.

"It would be extremely abusive if we carry out the death sentence on apostates and find out later (through *fatwa* or religious scholars) that it was not necessary.

"Therefore, it is better if we do not carry out the death sentence, as we will not be able to bring them back later," he said at a dialogue session after opening an international seminar on Islamic Law in the Contemporary World at the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (Ikim).

The prime minister was

asked when the government will decide on the issue of apostates and finalise the draft of the Apostasy Bill.

Mahathir admitted that some orthodox or extremist groups are of the opinion that the law against apostates is clear and that they should be sentenced to death.

However, he said, in Malaysia there is a different situation since it involves a multiracial society where marriages between races are possible.

And sometimes, due to certain conflicts, they have to be

divorced and the one who converted before the marriage may decide to go back to his or her original religion, he added.

"Whether we can do it in Malaysia, I do not know but it seems that if we carry out the death sentence this will become a disincentive to the non-Muslims to embrace the religion," he said.

Asked about the effort to standardise the implementation of Islamic law among the states, Mahathir said the matter is still a problem since some states have rejected it.