

Apostasy law will take some time: PM

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'Debate over the matter has been going on for over 1,400 years'

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri: It will take some time before the proposed Restoration of Faith (Apostasy) Bill is finalised because the draft has many weaknesses that will render it ineffective.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said there are still wide differences of opinion on the issue of apostasy, although the debate has been going on for over 1,400 years.

"There is still a difference of opinion about what it is and what to do to people who have committed *murtad* (apostasy).

"We cannot make a decision in a situation like this," he said after conducting an intellectual discourse on Islam and the future of Muslim youth with students of the International Islamic University (IIU) today. However, the government will continue studying the proposals.

Yesterday, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Rais Yatim said the Bill is still being formulated and will not be tabled in Parliament in the coming sitting beginning Oct 16.

Relating the varied opin-

ions on the subject, Mahathir said some people believe that the problem will be solved if the apostate is beheaded.

"That's why I asked earlier if you should behead former Argentinian president Carlos Menem (whom the PM referred to as an apostate because the former had denounced Islam and embraced Catholicism)."

Mahathir denied allega-

tions that Umno wants to implement the apostasy law because it wants to appear more Islamic.

"The question does not arise ... we are already Islamic. There is no less or more in being Islamic, there are only sinners and the righteous. That is for God to decide, not for us to determine," he added.

Earlier, in his speech, Ma-

hathir said the government should not be considered un-Islamic because it does not have the capacity to implement Hudud laws.

"Of all the 54 members of the Organisation of Islamic Countries, practically none have implemented hudud.

"They don't have the capacity to implement it in the proper way ... you cannot say they are unIslamic," he added.