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Mahathir-Penalty

DEBATE ON APOSTASY STILL NOT RESOLVED, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 24 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the death penalty for apostates is not implemented in Malaysia because the debate on the matter has not been resolved.

"Because there's no resolution, including on the death penalty (for those who commit apostasy), we choose not to do anything.

"It would be a grave injustice if the death penalty is imposed and is later found to be inappropriate," he said in a dialogue in conjunction with the international seminar on Islamic Law in the Contemporary World, here.

Dr Mahathir said such a penalty might also serve as a disincentive to non-Muslims to embrace Islam and hence hamper efforts to spread the Islamic faith.

He said that while the orthodox Muslims had no doubt about the death penalty for those who renounce Islam, there were those who said that implementing the death penalty was "inappropriate".

Dr Mahathir said that in a 100 per cent Muslim society, it might be possible to take stern action against apostates but in reality there was no such society now.

Touching on non-uniform Islamic laws in the states in Malaysia, he said the situation arose because religious matters were the prerogative of the rulers who had their own religious advisors.

"They believe in their independence and that's why the (religious) laws are different," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the federal government tried to give guidance on Islamic laws but unfortunately, some states were disagreeable.

"This makes their laws different from that of other states," he said.

On the government's move to monitor the actions of some parties including ulama who expressed "unhealthy" views, Dr Mahathir said that actually stern action could be taken against them.

However, it was better to have continuous information and education on true Islamic teachings to enable the people to counter such views, he said.

Meanwhile, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman, when met by reporters, said the opposition had played up the apostasy issue for political gains.

"PAS played up this issue because it is sensitive among the villagers. They exaggerate the issue and the number (of apostasy cases given by them) is also false," he said.

Asked on the standardisation of syariah laws, he said a paper on the matter was ready and would be forwarded to the Conference of Rulers for approval.

Abdul Hamid said the paper, among others, contained proposals on procedural matters.

-- BERNAMA

MAM AHH JK