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Dr M: Rulers can do more to foster unity

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JITRA, Thurs. - Malay Rulers can play a greater role in fostering unity among Muslims through the respective State Religious Councils and Fatwa Councils.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said since the Rulers are responsible for religion, they had specific roles to play in uniting the people.

"I do not know how this can be done but we do not want the Rulers to be involved in politics," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Rulers too were aware of the need to bring the people together but they fear that their intervention could be misconstrued as involving themselves in politics.

"Rulers cannot get involved in politics; instead they are responsible for religious affairs.

"So, I believe the Rulers would not want to do things which could be wrongly interpreted."

Dr Mahathir was asked about the roles the Malay Rulers, as the head of religion in their States, could play to foster unity among Muslims as all these while it was the Government which kept stressing the need for unity. Speaking to reporters at his Aidil Adha open house at Dewan Jitra here, he also said the Government had no plans to open the Malaysia-Thailand border round-the-clock as it would not benefit the country.

Dr Mahathir said more local people would spend time in the neighbouring country if the border was opened 24 hours.

"It (opening the border 24 hours) would not benefit us ... we also have no plans to open it on a 24-hour basis even two or three times a week."

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on a proposal by Perlis Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim that the Padang Besar Customs and immigration checkpoint be opened 24 hours on certain days of the week.

At present, the checkpoint and that at Wang Kelian in Perlis, Bukit Kayu Hitam (Kedah) and Rantau Panjang (Kelantan), are opened between 6am and 10pm.

Dr Mahathir said the Government planned to develop the border areas, including construction of a railway line to the neighbouring country via Kedah.

Now, there is only such a line through Padang Besar in Perlis.

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