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Dr M: No hasty decision on apostasy

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - The Government will not make hasty decisions on matters pertaining to apostasy as this is a matter which requires careful study, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"We cannot make hasty decisions regarding the matter as the debate on apostasy has been going on since the emergence of Islam about 1,400 years ago," he said.

"Even to this day, we still got differing opinions regarding apostasy or what we should do about the issue," he told a Press conference after opening the National Muslim Youth Intellectual Discourse organised by Political Science Students Forum of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) at the university's main campus in Gombak.

On the Bill on Apostasy passed by the Perlis Government, Dr Mahathir said: "We have found some weaknesses in it, rendering it quite ineffective, so we have yet to make a decision on it until it can be improved."

On allegations posted on the Internet that the Government would revoke the scholarship of University of Cambridge students who ask questions pertaining to the arms heist and the case of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim when the Prime Minister meets the students in England on Oct 4, he responded:

"I want to answer all questions about the arms heist but (DAP deputy chairman) Karpal Singh says that it would be contempt of court if I were to do so. So I cannot, not because of me, but because of Karpal."

He said Karpal Singh would have liked to have this provision perpetuated so that whenever there was a case in court, nobody could say anything.

"But of course he can, as he is a lawyer. If I am a lawyer, I can say also, but then I am not. I am trained as a doctor," he quipped.

Dr Mahathir said he could answer any questions on Al Ma'unah.

"In fact, I have never avoided questions posed to me," he said.

Asked about what Malaysia intends to do about allegations of Muslims in Jolo being badly treated by the Philippines military, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia could not interfere with the internal affairs of the Philippines.

"We have diplomatic relations with them and we can use diplomatic channels. That is the proper thing we can do.

"But beyond this, we cannot do much because those are their citizens and what is happening there is an internal matter for the Philippines."

He said if Malaysia was to interfere with the internal matters of other countries, then they would most likely also interfere with the internal affairs of Malaysia.

Although Malaysia was worried about Malaysians who are being held hostage by Filipino rebels, Dr Mahathir said the Government could not stop the Philippines Government from taking action within their own country and against their own people.

Dr Mahathir also reiterated that the Government could not subsidise prices of petroleum products anymore as it was already costing the government about RM5 billion.

"Furthermore, the petroleum prices in other countries are much higher than us although they also produce oil. The cheap price of petroleum in Malaysia has led to the smuggling of petroleum out of the country into neighbouring countries, which also means we are subsidising for them," he said.

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