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Mahathir-Law

GOVT MULLS OVER TIGHTENING OF LAW RELATING TO MISUSE OF RELIGION

BANGI, Nov 23 (Bernama) -- The government is looking into the possibility of amending the provision of the law relating to misuse of religion so that it is clearer and more effective, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said misuse or abuse of religion, any religion for that matter, could well breed distrust, hatred and irreparable disunity, thereby opening the possibility of rampant and widespread upheaval.

As such the full force of the law as "indeed provided under Section 298A of the Penal Code must be made to bear upon all parties who are in breach of offences related to religion misuse or abuse," he said.

"Although this particular provision of the penal law has been somewhat stalled for the past 12 years or so on account of certain judicial interpretation, the government is now on a renewed endeavour to overcome any shortcomings that the said provision may have incurred," he said.

This included the possibility of amending that provision of the law relating to religion misuse or abuse to be more distinct and operative, said Dr Mahathir said in a keynote address when opening a conference on "Terrorism and Political Violence" here.

His speech was read out by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Rais Yatim.

Later, when approached by reporters to elaborate on the matter, Rais said a body under his supervision, has been set up to study the possibility of amending the provision of the law concerned.

The body comprised the Attorney-General, the police and representatives of the Court.

He said that while Section 298A has been part of the Penal Code since 1986, a judicial interpretation made through a case known as the "Mamad Case in 1987 ruled that the section should not be applied to cases of religious crimes or those related to misuse or abuse of religion.

This conflicting view had made the law enforcers reluctant to apply that particular section for about 12 years, Rais said.

Nonetheless, he said, that the argument put forward in the interpretation was not fully valid in that it was only confined to Islam alone whereas that section encompassed all religions practised in the country.

"If this provision of the law is enforced, it could overcome problems relating to misuse of religion or distortion of any teachings, not only of Islam but all religions," Rais said.

Besides, he said, it was necessary to make in the provision of the law concerned clearer with regard to the powers of the state government and that of the federal government.

He was also asked about the growing inclination of politicians to be more aggressive and arrogant and Rais said he agreed that this seemed to be case now.

"From what I've seen during the nomination for the Lunas by-election this week the courteous characteristic of the Malays and Muslims was totally absent (from the crowd).

"What emerged was rough and boisterous behaviour and provocative gestures. I am against this trend which can spark off fights and rioting," he said.

As for law enforcers, Rais said maintaining public order and internal

security in the wake of such disturbing trend would require police personnel to be mentally stronger and have greater understanding of their responsibility.

Future law-enforcement would also take into account the antics and the unpredictability of aggressive politicians who were increasingly disrespectful of public order laws, Rais added.

-- BERNAMA

APG AFY RYN