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## Review of apostacy Bill

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The Government will review the Islamic Faith Bill (Akidah Islamiah) which aims to protect Muslims from deviationist teachings.

"We are having serious thoughts about the Bill as this is not a suitable time for its implementation," said Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Paduka Dr Abdul Hamid Othman.

He said the proposed Act needed to be "reviewed and deliberated" once again by the Islamic Development Department, State religious councils and the Attorney-General's Chambers to ensure its acceptance among Malaysians.

"A study on the social implications will also be conducted," Abdul Hamid said after presenting excellent services awards to 49 officers and staff of the Federal Territory Religious Council here.

The Act empowers Syariah Courts to prosecute those who practise deviationist teachings among Muslims and detain them for up to a year at rehabilitation centres in Negri Sembilan and Selangor.

However, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad recently said the proposed Bill contained many weaknesses.

Since it was introduced last April, Abdul Hamid said there had been much criticism from religious organisations which claimed that the Bill infringed on the people's constitutional right "to profess and practise any religion".

"We always co-operate with the State Governments but at present, there are no worthy examples which can be adapted to the proposed Bill.

"Due to this, Pusat Islam will seek an appropriate method and also wait for the correct time to introduce it."

He said during the recent Haj Conference here, the Government had also sought the views of Islamic countries on the problem of apostacy among Muslims.

"Not one Islamic country has such laws for apostacy... The only ones in existence are regulations on how to carry out religious missions and objectives.

"Their advise to us is simply be careful and cautious."

Abdul Hamid added that although apostacy was not widespread here, it had nevertheless been blown out of proportion by certain quarters.

"Such exaggeration will only cause the people to become unduly worried and frightened. The Act will only be implemented once the public fully understands the rationale for its implementation and are matured enough in their thoughts."

On another note, he said that land which had been bequeathed to Baitumal according to Islamic practices, would not be developed to provide housing to the poor.

"It is not advisable to develop our entire land reserves simply to provide housing for certain segments of the society. Let's leave this task to City Hall which has a much bigger land bank."

Abdul Hamid said land reserves were needed for the future development of Muslims.

"We are naturally cautious when carrying out development projects on our land reserves as this is to safeguard the interests of Muslims.

"The future Muslim community may need a religious school, mosque or community hall and these buildings can be constructed on our land reserves."

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