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Stricter rules on use of mosques

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BUKIT KAYU HITAM, Sun. - State Islamic Religious Councils will tighten regulations involving the use and administration of mosques to ensure they will not be used for political purposes.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Senator Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman, said today the Islamic Development Department has instructed all State Islamic Religious Councils to keep a closer watch on the use of mosques and surau.

"We have agreed to tighten rules regarding the use of mosques because reports we have received from the public indicate that they are being used as a platform for political speeches and to promote certain political parties," he said.

Abdul Hamid said the move was to prevent abuse of mosques and surau by the Opposition.

"The mosque is a place of worship and should not be used for political purposes.

"Umno has never used the mosque for political gain because we respect the law and the mosque as a place of worship."

He was speaking to reporters after handing out boxes of dates to heads of district councils and government departments and Islamic Councils members of five districts in southern Thailand on behalf of the Prime Minister's Department.

Abdul Hamid said this in reply to questions about what the Government had done in response to a Dec 12 news report that mosques and surau were being used by Pas to spread lies about the Government.

The report quoted Land and Co-operative Development Deputy Minister Tan Kee Kwong as saying 90 per cent of mosques and surau in the country were being used by Pas to spread lies about the Government even after the general election.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had also commented on the matter, saying that the Government would consider several strategies to stop the practice of using mosques for political purposes.

Abdul Hamid said the Government was taking a serious view of the matter as the Opposition's use of mosques had led its followers to equate political beliefs with religious faith.

"We have to monitor the situation closely. As with Al-Arqam before, if we do not take this seriously, it could get out of hand."

On the training programme involving the youths from southern Thailand, Abdul Hamid said a second batch of 1,200 students would be placed in Giatmara centres all over the country by the end of the month.

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