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System for collection, distribution of `zakat' to be standardised

PUTRAJAYA, Tue. - The Government will standardise the system for collecting and distributing zakat (tithe) in all States by the end of this year, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

He said the new system would increase efficiency and meet public expectations.

Abdullah added the move would not affect the State Governments' authority in matters pertaining to the collection and distribution of zakat.

"Muslims operate in all sectors; some have business interests in several States.

"All this raises questions on how and where they can make the zakat payments," Abdullah told a Press conference after chairing the 33rd Malaysian Islamic Affairs Development Committee meeting here.

Also present at the meeting were Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman, Islamic Development Department Malaysia director-general Datuk Abdul Hamid Zainal Abidin, Umno vice-presidents Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Tun Razak, Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib and Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

The meeting was also attended by all Barisan Nasional Muslim Menteris Besar and Chief Ministers, and representatives from other States.

Currently different States operate different systems in the collection and distribution of zakat, resulting in some States managing to collect a proportionately higher amount than others.

Abdul Hamid said that standardisation in the collection and distribution of zakat was needed to ensure optimum collection in all States.

He said some States had efficient systems which contributed to an increase in the amount of zakat collected.

He cited the Federal Territory, Penang and Malacca as examples of States which had efficient corporatised bodies to handle the collection of zakat.

Abdullah said Menteris Besar and Chief Ministers attending the meeting had agreed to the new system.

Abdullah said the meeting also agreed to find ways to increase the efficiency of State Religious Departments and Councils.

"We want a more efficient, streamlined and capable administration in our State Religious Departments and councils to enable them to better serve the rakyat."

He said two working papers on the matter were discussed in the meeting along with several suggestions raised.

This included a suggestion to invite the Treasury and the Public Services Department to give its input on the matter.

On another matter, Abdullah was asked to comment on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement while opening the MCA general assembly on Saturday that it might be possible one day for a non-Malay to become Prime Minister.

He said there were no specific provisions in the Federal Constitution which stated that only those of a certain religion or race could become Prime Minister.

"The Prime Minister spoke in the context of a future in which matters pertaining to racial considerations are no longer a problem," said Abdullah.

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