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Mahathir-Schools

GOVT MAY TIGHTEN LAWS TO CHECK ABUSE BY PRIVATE RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 1 (Bernama) -- Laws relating to educational institutions may be tightened further to check abuse of Islam by private religious school operators when wooing students to enrol in their schools, the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

He said Islam was being abused by the operators giving parents and students the impression that it is an Islamic obligation for students enjoying free education at government-aided religious schools to switch to fee-charging private ones.

Dr Mahathir revealed this at a news conference after opening the inaugural congress on Malay education here today jointly organised by the Peninsular Malaysia Malay Teachers Union and a body calling itself the Group of Concerned Malays.

"... This has become a problem...these people have been influenced by the belief that they are doing a good deed for the religion," the prime minister said.

Earlier in his speech, he quoted Education Ministry statistics that 30 per cent of primary schoolers, virtually all of them Malays, dropped out before entering secondary schools.

Dr Mahathir said these students may have chosen to enrol in private religious schools, which also follow the national curriculum, only to be taught by untrained teachers in rundown classrooms.

Though they may have been motivated to leave government-aided schools which have all the facilities and were instead willing to pay to pursue Islamic studies, it was unfortunate that they were only taught about the so-called unIslamic characteristics of the government, he said.

He said: " Almost of all them subscribe to the politics of the opposition. They even are prevented from accessing any explanation from the government.

" Their religious knowledge is in fact only superficial unlike those of the students of the olden days who mastered real religious knowledge," he said.

The prime minister said certain people felt uneasy if Malay students take up disciplines other than religion and were inclined to indoctrinate the students for their selfish ends.

Asked about the controversial mandatory agreement of undertaking proposed for the teaching profession, Dr Mahathir said such a contract between teachers and the government was necessary to instil discipline in the institution.

"Any organisation lacking discipline will not achieve the objective of its existence," he said.

He said dismissing errant government workers entailed a lengthy process and they could appeal in court against the disciplinary action meted out.

For instance, no action could be taken against a teacher found to be mixing politics in his students' test questions and the teacher mocked the government which could only transfer him to another school where he could still carry on with his negative activities, Dr Mahathir said.

"Unlike private sector workers, government staff are almost indissmissible and before expulsion can take place, the process is tedious and it is appealable in court," he said.

Dr Mahathir said because of the small size of the civil service in the past indiscipline among civil servants was not a problem then.

The Malays then, who were only interested in working with the government, had been a very disciplined lot, he said.

Presently however there was an erosion in discipline because of a handful of errant civil servants although the majority of them delivered, he said.

Dr Mahathir said the government need to discuss the proposed agreement of undertaking for teachers with Cuepacs, the largest union of public sector employees, to ensure acceptability of the contract's objectives.

Cuepacs a fortnight ago rejected the proposal saying the 1993 general order governing discipline and conduct of government employees would suffice.

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