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Budget-Reaction (Mahathir)

NO REASON FOR GOVT TO FINANCE DEVIANT RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 19 (Bernama) -- The Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the government sees no reason to set aside allocations for religious schools whose preachings run contrary to the true teaching of Islam.

"Religious schools are meant for teaching religion. If they are teaching something that is contrary to religion, we don't see why we are paying them money," he told reporters when approached after tabling the 2002 Budget at the Dewan Rakyat here today.

"We want to know whether they teach religion or not. If they teach something that is against the teaching of religion, is there any reason why the government should support (them)," he said replying to a reporter.

In his budget speech earlier, Dr Mahathir said that allocation for those propagating teachings against the true teaching of Islam, such as hatred for other Muslims, rejecting brotherhood of Muslims and branding other Muslims as infidels and spreading slanders, would be terminated.

The allocation provided was for propagating the knowledge of Islam and not otherwise, said Dr Mahathir, who is also the Finance Minister.

He said the government's objective was to establish a religiously correct Muslim community.

Dr Mahathir said although civil servants would get a half-month's bonus, half of it to be paid this month and the other in November, some in the lower income group would be getting the minimum quantum of RM1,000.

"RM1,000 is at times two months wages," he said adding that the government was giving more to the lower income group.

The government would be spending more money in the rural areas so as to help small contractors to earn more, the prime minister said.

To a question suggesting that the 2002 Budget is unfriendly to smokers, Dr Mahathir replied: "Why should I be friendly to smokers. They make me an unwilling secondary smoker. So why should I be nice to them. I'm trying to save their lives.

"Please don't smoke especially the children. I have seen so many cases of lung and throat cancer."

Asked about the apology tendered to him today by the Associated Press (AP) over its Oct 8 story by reporter Sean Yoong which quoted the Prime Minister out of context, Dr Mahathir said: "I have not seen it yet... anyway thank you for apologising. I accept the apology."

-- BERNAMA

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