

Dr M: New law to govern religious schools

STAR 2 FEB 2002

By SA'ODAH ELIAS

PUTRAJAYA: The Government is formulating a law to prevent private religious schools, including pondok schools, from being used as training grounds for religious extremists.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said many such schools were actually fronts for certain people to train their cadres and were not involved in imparting religious knowledge to their students.

He said he knew of a pondok religious school where students took up to 14 years to finish their studies supposedly in Islamic theology but in actual fact, the time was used to train them in "violent" activities.

Dr Mahathir said he could foresee some problems arising from the move because religious matters came under

the jurisdiction of the respective state governments.

He said there could be some resistance from certain state governments because they would want to continue to have a full say in the running of such schools so that their political future would be more secure.

However, he said there could be a way around the problem because matters on education were governed by the Federal Government.

"So if we know that they have misused education and schools to teach our children political ideology and train them in ways to topple the Government through violence, then we can take action against them," he said after officiating at the Federal Territory Day celebration for Putrajaya yesterday.

He was commenting a report about a religious school in Johor which was closed

down by the authorities and had 12 of its teachers, including the principal, arrested for allegedly being involved in the KMM.

Dr Mahathir said the Government would also formulate an integrated curriculum for religious schools in the country so that teachers would not be able to deviate from the specified syllabus.

In Johor Baru, MAZWAN NIK ANIS reports that the closure of Sekolah Islam Luqmatul Hakiem in Sungai Tiram had nothing to do with the alleged arrest of its 12 teachers' involvement in KMM.

The closure, according to the Johor Education and Religious Affairs departments were due to the school board's failure to adhere to guidelines drawn up by the departments.

Both authorities confirmed that the decision to reject the application for a licence and

the closure order had nothing to do with KMM activities as reported.

State Religious Committee chairman Hamzah Ramli said the Islamic Affairs Department did not want to approve the school's licence to provide religious education as it was not in tandem with Islamic teachings in the country.

"Investigations revealed the school practices the Wahabi teachings embraced by Muslims in Saudi Arabia.

"We informed them the policy here is to make uniform the Islamic practices to avoid confusion," he said, adding that Muslims here follow the Shafie sect or teachings.

In Tangkak, HAMDAN RAJA ABDULLAH quoted Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman as saying the school also had no permit from the state Education Department.