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Dr Mahathir witnesses row during prayer time at Terengganu mosque

KUALA TERENGGANU, Fri. - Friday prayers at a mosque here today were marred by a scramble to lead the congregation, witnessed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Pas State Legislative Assembly Speaker Datuk Hussain Awang tried to take the pulpit after the sermon was delivered by duty imam Mohd Nor Abu Bakar.

It was understood that Hussain had insisted that it was his turn to lead the congregation at the Losong Haji Mat Shafie Mosque.

The prayers, however, proceeded smoothly after Hussain was allowed to take the role of the imam.

It is also believed that about 15 people, believed to be Pas supporters led by Hussain and State Exco Council member Abdul Wahid Endut, had gone to the mosque about noon, apparently intending to lead the congregation and deliver the sermon.

However, on the advice of mosque committee member Datuk Ghazali Ahmad, the Pas delegation agreed to allow Mohd Nor to deliver the sermon while Hussain would lead the prayers.

State police chief Senior Assistant Commissioner (I) Othman Talib confirmed the incident.

Dr Mahathir expressed his disappointment over the incident, which he recounted when launching a housing project for fishermen's families in Kampung Tok Jembal.

He, however, did not name the person who scrambled to be the imam.

"I am sad that there should be a tussle," he said. "There is already an imam at the mosque and it was his duty to lead the prayers."

He said those who attempted to replace the imam today did not normally perform their prayers at the mosque.

"Why is it that he wanted to be the imam? I do not understand why there was a scramble. We are Muslims and should not be doing such things," he said.

"I'm grateful to God for being able to perform the Friday prayers at the mosque. On hearing that I was going to pray there, Pas supporters wanted to deliver the sermon to condemn the visitor to the mosque," he said.

Dr Mahathir said when the man did not succeed in being the khatib, he demanded to be the imam.

He said the Umno supporters, however, accepted him, and allowed him to lead the prayers "because that is the teaching of our religion."

He added that the magnanimity of Umno members in accepting a imam from among Pas members was unlike that of followers of the Opposition party, who would go to the extent of isolating Muslims and refusing to accept the imam appointed by the Government.

After the prayers, Dr Mahathir launched the Ummah Training Institute located at the mosque.

Dr Mahathir said a mosque was a place for Muslims to gather and build friendships among each other, and not a place to quarrel.

"I want to ask Pas where they learned that a mosque is a place to fight? But this is what Pas is doing," he said.