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PM gives reason for suspension of funds to religious schools

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government suspended funds to Sekolah Agama Rakyat temporarily as it does not want to see the creation of society with Muslims knowledgeable in religious matters only.

He said such a situation would not augur well for the country as Muslims should possess skills and knowledge in various disciplines as demanded by Islam, lest they be left behind.

Dr Mahathir said it was not necessary for all Muslims to become ulama or religious teachers, hence there was no necessity for parents to clamour sending their children to religious schools.

He said national schools should be the preferred choice as besides other subjects being taught, religious education was also not neglected.

Besides, children from various races mixing together would also enhance national unity and cooperation, elements that should be strengthened as they had helped the country to remain prosperous and peaceful over the years.

Speaking at a Hari Raya aid presentation ceremony to orphans at Bangunan Tabung Haji, the Prime Minister said having too many qualified persons in religion would serve no one any good.

"For example, the Government has advertised 100 vacancies for religious teachers but 4,000 applied. This means 3,900 people will not be successful...they will also find it difficult to get other jobs as they are not trained in other fields.

"This is the problem that will create tension in our society especially among Muslims. Frustrated, they might turn to undesirable activities."

The Prime Minister said if every Muslim was to become an ulama, problems could crop up especially when everybody held dissenting views on religious matters.

As a result, the community would be divided into groups and sects, each with their own leaders which would weaken Islam further.

He said parents should understand why the Government wanted their children to be sent to national schools.

He said the Government was a bit disappointed that its efforts to integrate children while in school had not been that successful as the Malays, Chinese and Indians preferred to have their children study at religious and national-type schools.

"Religious education is also taught at national schools and for those who choose to make it a career, similar with other disciplines, they can further their studies in universities and colleges offering such courses.

"This is the best approach that should be adopted by us living in a multi-ethnic society."

Dr Mahathir explained this was the real intention of the Government in suspending aid to religious schools.

"We will have religious schools but we will not assist those who pulled students from national schools to study at a place lacking facilities and trained teachers.

"Worse, they do not teach religion but other things like how to hate government leaders. This is totally opposite the true teachings of Islam that they should impart to the children."

Dr Mahathir said the Government was committed to developing Islam but the need to master non-religious skills should not be neglected.

On the event, Dr Mahathir praised the organiser, the Federal Territory Muslim Orphans Welfare Association, for its untiring effort in providing assistance to needy children, including non-Muslims.