

Religious schools regain funding

STAR 16 SEP 2003

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Education Ministry has once again started its allocation for *sekolah agama rakyat* (religious schools) which was stopped last year after some were found to have misused the schools.

Deputy Education Minister Datuk Abdul Aziz Shamsudin said the RM36mil for these schools could only be used to teach *fardu ain* (personal religious obligations) and *fardu kifayah* (social obligations).

"This allocation is not part of the Budget as we have supported these schools since 1959. It should be considered the Government's contribution to Islamic education rather than a per capita grant," he told reporters after present-

ing a working paper on *Education - Muslim Tradition of Excellence* at the International Conference of Young Muslim Leaders yesterday.

To receive this allocation, Abdul Aziz said these schools had to conform to the ministry's curriculum and teach only *fardu ain* and *fardu kifayah* and they would be monitored for compliance by the ministry.

Abdul Aziz said students who attended normal schools in the morning could attend the *sekolah agama rakyat* in the afternoon.

"These religious studies would be additional to what Muslim students already study in schools. I feel that what is taught in schools is already sufficient.

"But if we don't entertain requests for students to attend these schools, we are

seen as anti-Islam and this is bad for the country. We were also accused of being under the thumb of the US government, which is not true," he said.

After presenting his paper, Abdul Aziz also answered questions from the floor on a variety of issues

Last October, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said the Government had stopped giving grants and financial aid to all *sekolah agama rakyat* as they had been misused to teach children politics instead of religion.

He had said the schools, which claimed to be religious, were in fact "political schools."

Dr Mahathir had also said the Government would only resume financial aid when it is satisfied the schools truly taught religion.