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PM: Government will absorb SAR teachers into national schools

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JELI, Thurs. - The Government will absorb teachers from People's Religious Schools or Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SAR), including the unqualified ones, into national schools and give them better pay, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"We will employ them. We can accept and help them. We will give training to those not qualified. But the SAR teachers' employment will be on a trial basis because we have to be sure of their sincerity," he told a gathering of 8,000 people in Air Lanas here this morning.

Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, said he hoped SAR teachers would be sincere and that incidents of teachers inculcating hatred against the Government would not recur, citing as an example teachers introducing opposition politics in art lessons.

"In these lessons, children were asked to make special drawings. For instance, they were taught to make plates on which they were encouraged to paint the border green. The children's finished products, of course, resembled the symbol of a certain party," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Government was giving good treatment to SAR teachers and pupils as well as parents to help the young generation benefit from proper and adequate religious education.

There are 71 such religious schools in Kelantan. So far, some 1,620 pupils from SAR have enrolled in national schools.

Dr Mahathir said there was no need for parents to enrol their children at SAR when there were good national schools where religious education was provided.

He said children at national schools were taught true Islamic teachings, not politics.

Dr Mahathir added the syllabus for Islamic studies at national schools was carefully structured to suit the various school levels.

What pupils get at national schools is a complete and rounded education to enable them to further their studies in any discipline, including Islamic studies.

"This is the type of education our children get from national schools. They can be doctors, engineers or lawyers or enrol in Al-Azhar to study Islam."

Dr Mahathir also advised Umno members who had enrolled their children at these religious schools to take them to national schools.

Explaining the Government's decision to stop funding SAR, Dr Mahathir said it was because the Government did not want to assist the school administrators and operators in teaching pupils "Islam that is not true".

He said the Government funded the schools because there were parents who wanted their children to have a religious education and that it felt it had a duty to do so.

But when it was found that the schools also taught politics of hate, the Government refused to collaborate with them, he said.

Dr Mahathir also said SAR administrators often inflated the enrolment number at their schools.

He said they did so to ensure that funding would continue as they feared that a declining figure would not justify further funding.

Dr Mahathir said the Government was trying to improve the curriculum for Islamic studies.

Lamenting the involvement of Muslims in criminal cases, including incest

and rape, the Prime Minister said he felt much sadness and shame.

Dr Mahathir said of the total number of cases like dadah abuse, HIV/AIDS, rape and incest, 54 per cent involved Malay Muslims.

"Why is this happening? Because we are not teaching true Islamic values to our children."

Dr Mahathir, accompanied by Information Minister and Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob, arrived here by helicopter. Kelantan Umno liaison chief and Jeli Umno division head Datuk Mustapa Mohamed was also with him.

The Prime Minister was here to present cash to 20 poor pupils, six spouses of tiger attack victims as well as a survivor, Abdullah Mamat, and to open the SK Air Panas RM1.2m hall.

Mustapa, welcoming Dr Mahathir, said the people of Jeli truly missed him and were anxiously waiting for his arrival because of their deep respect for him and his immense contributions to the constituency.

"You have not been here that long, yet the people are here this morning in full force," he said.

This is Dr Mahathir's third visit to Kelantan.