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FINANCIAL AID

819 RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS GET RM76M

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Govt hopes to boost Islamic education through fund under 2017 Budget

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THE government is committed to strengthening Islamic education and turn registered pondok schools, Sekolah Menengah Agama Rakyat and tahfiz schools into excellent institutions.

This was evident when more than RM76 million was disbursed to 819 religious schools by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak yesterday.

The allocation, under the Special Fund for Improvement and Maintenance of Schools as announced in the 2017 Budget, is aimed at empowering and strengthening religious educa-

tion institutions.

Najib said the government recognised the importance of religious schools, especially tahfiz schools, which had become a popular choice among parents and students.

"In recent years, I note that tahfiz institutions have become a trend among students.

"So, it's the government's responsibility to make sure tahfiz education is not only parents' choice but also to produce excellent individuals. With this fund, I hope the development of tahfiz education is more systematic and orderly."

He presented mock cheques to headmasters and school representatives at Seri Perdana here. A total of 129 *sekolah pondok*, 99 Sekolah Menengah Agama Rakyat and 591 tahfiz institutions received the fund.

Najib stressed the government's commitment to developing Islam, adding that Islamic education institutions were at the highest level, especially after the introduction of the Malaysian Syariah Index in 2015, a method



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak with religious school headmasters and representatives, who had earlier received financial aid, in Putrajaya yesterday. With them is Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Jamil Khir Baharom (to Najib's right). PIC BY MOHD FADLI HAMZAH

to gauge objectively and scientifically Malaysia's commitment to achieving the eight principles of the Maqasid Syariah (goal of Islamic principles).

"The eight principles are education, Islamic law, economy, politics, health, social, cultural and infrastructure and environment. Of these, education recorded the highest score with 82.5 per cent, an achievement we should be proud of.

"This index is to dismiss the unhealthy polemic that Malaysia is a failed state, being not Islamic enough and too strict."

He said it was meaningful when Malaysia was recognised by the Saudi Arabian government with the state visit by King Salman Abdulaziz Al-Saud from Feb 26 to March 1.

Najib told the audience that false negative perceptions of Malaysia almost cost the country

a RM31 billion investment from Saudi Arabia.

He said Saudi Arabia was initially reluctant to invest in Malaysia because of the false perception that the country was a failed state.

Najib hoped religious education in the country would combine knowledge of Quran, science and revelation (*wahyu*) to create excellent and complete Muslims.

"This will be our strength to build a successful Islamic civilisation."

He called on private tahfiz schools to register with state Islamic departments to receive incentives worth RM10,000.

Present were Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Jamil Khir Baharom and Islamic Development Department director-general Tan Sri Othman Mustapha.

Religious school teacher Mo-

hammad Aziz Che Man from Kelantan thanked the government for its commitment to strengthen religious education.

"The financial aid of more than RM20 million to 49,000 students in 115 schools in the state will ensure they receive quality religious education."

Selangor Tahfiz Institution Association chairman Muhamad Hafiz Mohd Haneefa welcomed the move by the government in launching the National Tahfiz Education Policy last year and hoped the allocation would strengthen the infrastructure of tahfiz schools in producing outstanding Muslims.

"There are 300 registered tahfiz schools in Selangor with 18,000 students.

"Muslim parents send their children to tahfiz schools as they are confident with these institutions."