

Be more 'critical and constructive', Najib tells religious bodies
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KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 30 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak today told the country's religious institutions to be "critical and constructive" when exercising their duties, saying the changing environment poses new challenges to the handling of Islamic matters in Malaysia.

The prime minister said wider access to communication tools has made Malaysians better informed compared to a few decades ago and hence, necessitates a more systematic and strategic plan in the development of Islam.

"Civil servants, especially those in religious institutions and religious teachers, should be critical and constructive when exercising their duties in order to find creative and innovative solutions that are outside the box.

"This is important in order for religious departments and the relevant institutions to excel when servicing the rakyat," Najib (picture) said in his speech at the launch of the Malaysian Islamic Management Transformation Carnival 2011 at the Putra World Trade Centre here this morning.

He underlined his administration's Government Transformation Programme (GTP) as an initiative that is not only concerned with developing the economy but also encompasses the transformation of Islam in Malaysia.

He said to remain relevant, religious institutions needed to embrace societal changes and move together with the times and the community's demands.

"In terms of administration, the key concern is a leadership that has integrity and an excellent work culture.

"A change in mindset is the most important foundation for change when developing an organisation. This includes a change in culture, especially values in life," said Najib.

He also gave his government's commitment to supporting the transformation of Islam in Malaysia, saying religious institutions would be further strengthened through bigger allocations.

"We will also continue to respect the division of powers between the states and the federal government when it comes to religious matters, while at the same time we will find room to strengthen the development of Islam," he said.

The country recently turned into a hotbed for religious tension, buoyed by events such as the church raid by the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (Jais).

In the August 3 incident, department officials and the police reportedly interrupted a dinner function organised by non-governmental organisation Harapan Komuniti upon receiving complaints that the church was proselytising to Muslims there.

The raid sparked a heated debate among the country's religious communities.

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