

Hadi's bill a political gimmick, says Dr Mahathir

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By Sean Augustin

Former prime minister believes Prime Minister Najib Razak is in a dilemma from which there is no way out, by allowing Hadi's bill to be tabled.

SHAH ALAM: The recent motion to table a private member's bill to increase the punitive powers of the shariah court has nothing to do with Islam, Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The former prime minister explained that this was because Islam would never encourage actions that would split the Muslim community.

"It was used as a political gimmick for one party," he told reporters after attending a dialogue here last night.

Mahathir was asked to comment on PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang's tabling of his private member's bill to amend the Syariah Courts (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act or Act 355, in the Dewan Rakyat on Thursday.

The bill seeks to increase punishments for shariah offenders, from the current three years' jail to 30 years, from the maximum RM5,000 fine to RM100,000 and from six strokes of the cane to 100 lashes.

The PPBM chairman went on to state that in a multi-religious and multi-racial country like Malaysia, one must be sensitive to those who practise other religions, stressing that Islam teaches Muslims to respect the beliefs of others.

Mahathir also said that the issue surrounding the bill to amend Act 355 has left Prime Minister Najib Razak in a dilemma for which there was no way out.

"He does not know what to do. He wants to back the bill because he wants PAS' support, but if he gets that, he will lose the backing from the other parties."

When asked if Najib would lose votes – presumably in the next general election – because of this issue, Mahathir said he hopes the Barisan Nasional chairman will lose "all votes".

"He tried to use religion to garner votes, but he failed."

On a separate matter, Mahathir said that Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM) had not discussed the Law Reform (Marriage and Divorce) Act 1976 – which was recently deferred – in depth.

But Malaysia's longest serving PM personally felt that it is not the intention of Islam and a government dominated by Muslims to compel people to do things against their wishes.

Stopping short of declaring his support for the reforms, Mahathir said: "I think we should respect the religious wishes of the people."

Two days ago, Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said that the bill would not be tabled in the current Parliament sitting as it must be studied in detail and feedback must be obtained from relevant quarters to prevent conflict with the fatwa and Federal Constitution.

When asked to comment on Swiss Attorney-General Micheal Lauber's statement that he was confident the money laundering probe into 1MDB would bear fruit despite Malaysian authorities' refusal to cooperate, Mahathir – known for his acerbic wit – said:

"We will make better progress without this AG," he said, alluding to Malaysia's Attorney-General Mohamed Apandi Ali.

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