

Islamic state a hot issue

Topic looks set to dominate proceedings at last parliament meeting of the year

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By V. Gayathry

The last meeting of the Dewan Rakyat for the year that opens tomorrow may see sparks flying as the Islamic state issue looks set to dominate the proceedings.

With two opposition parties - DAP and PAS - finally breaking off their 20-month-old alliance over this very issue, the Barisan Nasional government has come in as the third party that has revived the debate on whether Malaysia should be an Islamic state.

"I foresee a heated debate on the matter, with PAS most likely to direct its challenges to Umno and DAP to MCA," said deputy speaker Datuk Lim Si Cheng.

This, of course, comes shortly after BN component parties, especially MCA, Gerakan and SUPP - representing the Chinese community - took DAP to task for cooperating with PAS, despite having clearly opposing ideologies.

It appears that the Opposition has the game in its favour now, and this

opportunity will be capitalised during the parliament meeting.

If the 37 opposition backbenchers from PAS and DAP have it their way, then they will certainly be aiming their shots at the BN leaders over this topic.

When opening the Gerakan assembly last week, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that Malaysia qualifies as an Islamic state, and is recognised by the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) as one.

This is being hotly disputed by DAP, which points out that the Constitution defines Malaysia as a secular state, with Islam as the official religion. As such, all this talk of Malaysia being an Islamic state is moot.

PAS, on the other hand, is pressuring Umno leaders into debating the issue, something the latter has repeatedly declined to do.

Whatever the case, this topic is expected to overshadow the tabling of the Budget 2002 by Mahathir on Oct 19. The budget is expected to include additional financial package for the relevant industries to cushion the impact of a

PM: No need for debate

Malaysians are not confused about Islamic state issue

By Seema Viswanathan and V. Gayathry

KUALA LUMPUR, There is no need for a debate on whether Malaysia is an Islamic state, says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said Malaysia is not a "confused" country and that the current concept of Malaysia is an Islamic state. However, he added that they are concerned about PAS' interpretation of an Islamic state.

PAS yesterday interpreted a suggestion by the religious bureau chairman, the Rev Akbar Rahman, that the two parties consider an Islamic state as the Islamic

interviews of the Prime Minister, he said they should not discuss the issue. Mahathir said the BN government parties are also of the opinion that the issue is not a matter that should be discussed.

Later Saturday, Mahathir said Malaysia is already an Islamic state and that any claims that the concept of an Islamic state was not defined in the Quran is incorrect. He said if there were suggestions, they can explain

the attacks on the US, the global superpower is trying to get other countries into its camp, and this could possibly have adverse effects on those who choose not to side with it.

He also said since the attacks, Malaysia, as a Muslim nation, will be closely watched and a domestic clash between two Muslim groups (Umno and PAS) will further cast a bad image on the religion.

The tabling of the Budget by Mahathir, who is also finance minister, on Oct 19, has been brought forward by a week because he is scheduled to attend the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) Summit in Beijing beginning Oct 20.

This last meeting in the second session of the 10th parliament is expected to last until the second week of December, with a possible extension.

So far, the bills that will be tabled are related to the regulation of intellectual property, although MPs expect the amendments to the Election Offences Act to prevent legal challenge of an electoral roll to be tabled as well.

global economic slowdown, made worse by the attacks on the US.

The balance of the RM4.3 billion stimulus package announced by Mahathir on Sept 25 will also be announced then.

DAP secretary-general Kerk Kim Hock said the debates during this meeting will be dominated by the Islamic state issue, as other orders like the tabling of bills will not draw the interest or attention of the MPs.

"I am sure that PAS and DAP will make it an issue because it concerns the aspirations of Malaysians," said the Kota Melaka MP.

Meanwhile, Lim said there has been no indication so far from the gov-

ernment that it plan to table a resolution at the Dewan Rakyat on Malaysia's stand on the attacks and actions against the perpetrators.

"For the government to do so, the cabinet must have met first and decided on it, but I am not aware of it yet. The opposition backbenchers may table their motions," said the MP for Senai.

PAS Youth chief Mahfuz Omar, who is Pokok Sena MP, said he will table a motion to condemn the declaration by the US to launch a war on Afghanistan and the impact on Malaysia's economy and society.

He said PAS will challenge the prime minister to declare that Malaysia is

an Islamic state in his Budget 2002 speech, effectively to address the highest authority in the country on such an important matter.

BN MP for Tambun, Datuk Husni Hanadzlah, who is the Backbenchers Club secretary, does not think it is appropriate for the MPs to debate on the details of the Islamic state concept, which can be better resolved by a closed-door meeting involving all Muslim leaders.

"Islamic state is an abstract concept. There are bigger issues that we should be concerned about, like the changing nature of the global security and economic system," he said.

For one, he said, since

