

# Declaration of Islamic state to be explained

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PETALING JAYA: The MCA will explain to party members its decision, along with that of other parties in the Barisan Nasional, why the ruling coalition will not amend the Federal constitution following Umno's declaration that Malaysia is an Islamic country.

"As far as MCA is concerned, there is no change in the constitution. Malaysia is a multi-ethnic, multi-racial and multi-religious country," party vice-president Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn said after launching an IT course for purchasers of Putra Permai low and medium cost apartments in Seri Kembangan yesterday.

"Malaysia is also a modern and liberal state. We accept Islam as the official religion while other religions are allowed to be practised."

He said Chinese Malaysians should be proud of the country as they could continue to practise their own religion and culture as enshrined in the Federal Constitution.

The DAP, however, said the question of Islamic state has far reaching political, legal and constitutional implications for plural and secular Malaysia.

It wants a public debate on the issue, party secretary general Kerk Kim Hock said yesterday.

The Kota Melaka MP said Malaysians who understood and accepted the secular system of the 1957 constitution were shocked when Prime minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that Malaysia was already an Islamic country.

He added that DAP could not accept the reasoning and logic

given by Dr Mahathir that there was no need for debate over the issue as the various races and religions had all along been living in an Islamic country without any problem.

Kerk said the Prime Minister's statement that there was no need to amend the constitution cannot be accepted as "the end of the story".

"Malaysians must express their concern about such a declaration and engage in a full and public debate to determine whether Malaysia should remain a secular democratic nation or become an Islamic state," he said.

"The question of an Islamic state whether ala PAS or Umno, has far reaching political, legal and constitutional implications for a plural and secular Malaysia," he added.