

DAP questions labelling of Malaysia as an Islamic state

SUN - 7 OCT 2001

PETALING JAYA, Sat: DAP leaders, after their recent breakup with PAS over the differences on the Islamic state issue, now question the endorsement by Barisan Nasional component parties that Malaysia is indeed an Islamic state.

They demand an answer as to why Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who made the announcement last week, rejected the need for a public debate on the matter.

In addition, they challenge the labelling of the country as an Islamic state, when the Federal Constitution explicitly defines Malaysia as a secular state.

DAP chairman Lim Kit Siang, in a statement, asked: "How and when did Malaysia transform from a secular to an Islamic state? Is it on the declaration of the prime minister or on the expressed wishes of the people?"

He also chided BN parties such as MCA, MIC, Gerakan and SUPP for accepting the declaration without seeking a full mandate from their party central committees and congress as they had been rejecting the idea all this while.

He quoted the first prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman who had declared in parliament that the country is not an Islamic state as it is generally understood, but Islam is the official religion of the state.

Yesterday, Mahathir said after chairing the BN Supreme Council meeting that the component members are comfort-

able with the concept and there is no confusion among the various races and religious groups in the country.

DAP Secretary-general Kerk Kim Hock said the question of an Islamic state, whether as conceptualised by PAS or Umno, has far-reaching political, legal and constitutional implications.

"The thrust of the debate is not, however, whether Malaysians want an Islamic state à la by PAS or Umno, but whether the country should remain a secular democratic nation," he said in a separate statement.

Kerk said Mahathir's declaration that there is no need to amend the Constitution as Malaysia is already an Islamic state "cannot be the end of the story".

Deputy chairman Karpal Singh said provisions under Article 3(1) of the Constitution cannot be interpreted as reflecting the country as an Islamic state.

In 1988, he said a five-member bench of the Supreme Court unanimously held that the term "Islam" or "Islamic religion" in Article 3 referred to acts related to rituals and ceremonies.

"It is precisely for this reason that the country is not an Islamic state, that PAS has publicly embarked on a campaign to turn the country into one.

It was also for that reason that DAP disassociated itself from PAS and left the opposition coalition, he said in a statement.