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Ling: No plans to make Malaysia a theocratic state

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat: MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik today reassured the Chinese community that Malaysia will remain a secular state although Islam is the official religion of the country.

He said a lot of people are alarmed over the matter and do not yet have the chance to discuss the implications since Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's announcement on Sept 28 that Malaysia is an Islamic state.

"What you enjoyed over the past 44 years will stay. The prime minister has assured the people that there will not be any constitutional change to make the country a theocratic state. All races will continue to enjoy what they have.

"Malaysia is a secular state where other races are allowed to practice their own religion, although the Constitution states that Islam is the official religion.

"Thus, Malaysia is not a theocratic state but it can be called a secular state," he said after

attending a five-hour dialogue session on the Malaysia as an Islamic nation issue.

Among the panelists were Sisters In Islam executive director Zainah Anwar, political writer Dr Farish Noor and the prime minister's religious advisor Tan Sri Hamid Othman.

Also present were MCA leaders and Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism representatives.

Ling described the dialogue as an informative exchange of ideas between the panelists and MCA members.

"Today, we listened to some fears and anxiety over the matter. However, some concrete proposals and suggestions were also made to alleviate the fears."

Ling said some questions raised during the dialogue were on whether Mahathir's announcement will inspire certain quarters to be more Islamic.

He said some of the proposals will be forwarded to Hamid for further action.