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Mahathir-Constitution

AMENDMENT UNNECESSARY, M'SIA ALREADY ISLAMIC STATE, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 5 (Bernama) -- The Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said there is no need for Malaysia to amend its constitution to make it an Islamic country as it is already one such nation.

"When Umno pronounces that Malaysia is an Islamic country now it does mean that a constitutional amendment is impending to turn it into an Islamic nation since it is already one such country," he said.

He said the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition agreed that all along multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-cultural Malaysians have co-existed under the existing constitution and faced no problem at that.

Dr Mahathir, who is BN chairman, told reporters this after chairing a BN supreme council meeting at Menara Datuk Onn of the Putra World Trade Centre here today.

He said all the BN component parties were comfortable and had no problem with accepting Malaysia as an Islamic nation as declared by Umno.

When Dr Mahathir opened the Gerakan 30th delegates' conference here on Sept 29, he declared publicly that Malaysia is an Islamic state, thus accepting PAS president Datuk Fadzil Noor's challenge for him to do so.

At today's BN supreme council meeting the coalition partners expressed apprehension of PAS' version of an Islamic state because the opposition party had yet to explain what it had in mind, Dr Mahathir said.

The BN component parties, he said, questioned why the DAP itself, which withdrew from an opposition alliance with PAS following differences over the Islamic state issue, did not reject Umno's declaration that Malaysia is an Islamic country.

The BN component parties were of the view that the DAP would have to explain how else it would want Malaysia to be so as to be a better country than now, he said.

"This is because they (the DAP) have existed in the country without problem for the past 44 years...so what amendment does it desire whereas the DAP too accepts the prevailing situation," Dr Mahathir said.

Asked about PAS' insistence that Umno declare in Parliament that Malaysia is an Islamic country and let MPs debate the matter, Dr Mahathir said there was no necessity for that.

Umno preferred not to engage in a debate with PAS over the issue as PAS would only want to promote its disagreement to everything that Umno did and was only out to gain political mileage, Dr Mahathir said.

Malaysians at large were already aware of their country being an Islamic state and to them this was official, the prime minister said.

The meeting also discussed threats posed by militant and terrorist groups and was briefed by the Deputy Prime Minister cum Home Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on the latest situation.

"The component parties are satisfied with the government's handling of the matter and backed the move to detain those posing the threats under the Internal Security Act," Dr Mahathir said.

Dr Mahathir said the BN component parties also endorsed the government stand that while it backed the United States' war against terrorism, Malaysia opposed military strikes against any country.

"We want the causes of terrorism to be identified and action be taken to resolve them. We agreed that an international conference on terrorism be held," the prime minister said.

Ideally, he said, the United Nations should be organising it and even if not all countries could attend, nations mostly affected by terrorism should take part and define what is terrorism and formulate measures to deal with the menace.

He said foreign ministers of member countries of the Organisation of Islamic countries would discuss these issues when they meet in Qatar on Wednesday.

Asked about topics he would discuss with US President George W. Bush at the Apec meeting in Shanghai later this month, Dr Mahathir said he would state Malaysia's stand on terrorism.

"If and when we meet we shall discuss terrorism. We have no idea yet as to what President Bush would say," Dr Mahathir said.

The meeting also congratulated the Sarawak BN for its landslide victory in the Sept 27 state election and for being returned to power after capturing 60 of the 62 seats.

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