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Chinese rights are guaranteed

IT is not often realised that maintaining peace and progress in a multi-racial country like Malaysia is one of the most difficult political challenges in this region, possibly even the world. That the country has been able to not only forge a harmonious society but achieve rapid economic progress in the 44 years since independence is largely due to the astute leadership and moderate policies of the Umno-led coalition Government.

The policies of moderation, tolerance and accommodation remain unchanged despite the Government's declaration of Malaysia as an Islamic state. Let there be no mistake. The religious and other rights of the Chinese and other non-Muslim Malaysians will continue to be guaranteed and protected under the Constitution.

However, in the light of their fears and suspicions, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has re-assured the Chinese community that their rights will not be taken away and they are always represented in the Government. The Prime Minister's timely re-assurance should put to rest any lingering doubts and apprehension among the Chinese that their rights are threatened or perceived to be threatened just because Malaysia is now declared an Islamic state. Malaysia is a tolerant Islamic country which is also a Parliamentary democracy. Ask any objective observer whether the Chinese are in danger of losing their rights. The honest answer is, obviously not. There is no other place in Asean where the Chinese are treated better than in Malaysia.

But there will be politicians who will fan the fears of the Chinese to turn them against Umno. It is important that they should not allow themselves to fall prey to any such instigation. Umno has a proven track record of being a moderate, modern and forward looking political party willing to co-operate, work and share power with the Chinese and other races. In fact, it is in the self-interest of the Chinese community that Umno stays as the dominant political party because this will ensure Malaysia will continue to be governed by it because it accommodates the rights and interests of the Chinese and other communities as entrenched in the Constitution.

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