

24 NOV 2001

Abdullah-Islam

CONSTITUTION AND LAW UNCHANGED DESPITE ISLAMIC NATION STATUS, SAYS DPM

KOTA KINABALU, Nov 24 (Bernama) -- Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today reiterated that the federal constitution and the law of the country remain unchanged despite Malaysia's Islamic nation status.

He gave an assurance that the statement by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that Malaysia is an Islamic country would not lead to amendments being initiated to the federal constitution and the law of the country.

He said that the Prime Minister was not making a statement of intent, indicating that the government intended to turn Malaysia into an Islamic country.

"He was merely stating that there definitely exist a situation in the country whereby it can be regarded as an Islamic country. It is a statement of fact of the reality that exist," he said when opening the 12th Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) congress here.

Abdullah said that the people in the country were free to practise their religions.

The statement by the Prime Minister, he said, would not affect the freedom of worship long enjoyed by the country's multi-ethnic and mutli-religious society.

Abdullah expressed the hope that LDP members would accept the statement made by the Prime Minister without fear or concern.

The Deputy Prime Minister also said that the success of the Barisan Nasional (BN) in retaining power in the 1999 state election had restored the confidence and attracted foreign investors to the state.

He said that the BN state government must prove its capability to develop the state even in the wake of the economic slowdown.

"If strong unity exist within the party it will help resolve whatever problems faced by the country and affecting the economy," he said.

The federal government, he said, should be able to avoid a recession even though the economic growth in the third quarter was below 1 per cent.

Abdullah said that even in the midst of the global economic uncertainty, the government had taken into account the welfare of the people especially those in the rural areas.

"The government gives very serious attention to the well-being of the people and strives to ensure that they do not suffer as a result of the prevailing economic situation," he said.

This was proven by the largest allocation made for rural development in Budget 2002, he added.

Earlier, LDP president Datuk Chong Kah Kiat said that Sabah's economy must undergo structural reforms in line with the national goals on development.

He said the state needs to intensify its agricultural development and food production to accomplish the national objective.

The poverty rate of the state must be brought down to an acceptable level through meaningful rural development and poverty eradication programmes, he said.

"Infrastructure and utilities require urgent upgrading and improvement to meet the people's basic needs," said Chong who is also Sabah Chief Minister.

In addition, Sabah needs foreign investments for steady economic growth

and it continues to rely on foreign workforce which had caused the state some serious problem, he said.

In this matter, the LDP has an important role to play in helping the government to overcome economic difficulties by educating the masses, particularly the Chinese community on the significance of the state government's war on timber theft, fish-bombing and smuggling of illegal migrants syndicate, said Chong.

He also said the state government recently declared war on wastage of public funds.

"Law and order, transparency in the public administration, prudent financial management and judicious use of the state's resources are essential to attract foreign investment," he said.

Chong gave his assurance that the government was prepared to accept constructive criticisms on the administration of the state.

"I assure you that the government will take remedial measures to wipe out any unhealthy practices," he said.

-- BERNAMA

HAK RM