

07/10/2001

DPM: Umno-Pas talks unnecessary

KEPALA BATAS, Sat. - Umno does not see the need to hold a dialogue with Pas on the Islamic state issue, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

The Umno deputy president said the party instead wanted Pas to explain its version of an Islamic state.

Umno, on its part, had already given adequate explanation on the matter, he said after chairing a meeting of Penang Umno.

Abdullah said the statement by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad last Saturday that Malaysia was already an Islamic state was accepted by the Barisan Nasional Supreme Council.

The Government would not make any amendments to the Federal Constitution in connection with the issue, he said.

Abdullah, who is the Deputy Prime Minister, said the declaration of Malaysia as an Islamic state did not affect the religious freedom enjoyed by non-Muslims in the country.

"We must understand that Malaysia is made up of people of many races and religions," he added.

In Kuala Lumpur, People's Progressive Party (PPP) president Datuk M. Kayveas said his party accepted "with an open heart" that Malaysia was already an Islamic state.

Urging Pas to do likewise, he said the declaration by Dr Mahathir had caught the opposition party by surprise.

"If other Islamic countries and Muslim scholars can recognise Malaysia as an Islamic state, there is no reason why Dr Mahathir's open declaration should be disputed by Pas," he said before the PPP's central working committee meeting.

In Kota Kinabalu, Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah, a Barisan Nasional component party, said it would explain to the people Dr Mahathir's statement that Malaysia was an Islamic country.

Party president Tan Sri Joseph Kurup said the Opposition might exploit the issue and it was necessary for PBRS to give a clear picture.

"We will go to the grassroots and explain to the people that our country is an Islamic country which we have known for so long.

"We are happy and comfortable with it," Kurup said, after opening a unit trust socio-economic seminar today.

"Overseas, people know us as an Islamic country. Nothing is going to change because the Federal Constitution will not be amended.

"We can continue to practise other religions in peace as guaranteed by the Constitution," Kurup said.

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