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Mahathir-Chinese

MAHATHIR ALLAYS CHINESE COMMUNITY'S FEAR ABOUT ISLAMIC STATE

By: David Chelliah

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 10 (Bernama) -- Malaysia, despite declaring itself as an Islamic state, will not deprive the rights of the country's non-Muslims, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight.

"Your rights will remain your rights...The Chinese in Malaysia will be Malaysian citizens with all the rights they have enjoyed ever since the country obtained independence," he said.

Dr Mahathir allayed fears of the Chinese community on the Islamic state issue when he addressed Chinese businessmen at a dinner hosted by the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia (ACCCIM).

"We have no wish to obstruct or to curtail your rights in this country. We are not changing anything... We are not amending the Constitution," he said.

The Prime Minister said the Islamic state declaration did not mean that there was no place or freedom for non-Muslims.

He said it was all right for non-Muslims to regard Malaysia as a secular state because they were not obstructed from doing anything within the country's laws.

The reason behind the government's declaration that Malaysia was an Islamic state, he said, was because the opposition wanted to know the Barisan Nasional's stand on the issue.

"I do hope the Chinese community will cease to worry about this statement. Please do not go around and say that the government is going to do something that will deprive their (non-Muslims) rights...That is not true at all.

"Please do not listen to people who want to make an issue. The opposition won't come out to say their stand because they are cheating the non-Muslims by not telling what they want.

"I suspect they wanted an Islamic state like Afghanistan. If the Malaysian opposition wants to set up a government like the Taliban of course they are not going to get the support of the non-Muslims in the election," he said.

In Malaysia all races "live, play and work together. Let's keep it that way," he added.

The Prime Minister said non-Muslims had been living in this country since independence and although they might not know it, they were actually living in an Islamic state by definition.

He said the non-Muslims had not suffered because of that and had not been discriminated against, oppressed or had any action taken against them because they were not Muslims.

"You have done business in this country and prospered...You have prospered in Malaysia all along in an Islamic state. The Government has worked with the Chinese community all these while," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that in Malaysia, the Chinese community was well-represented in the government and it was able to look after the interests of the community.

He urged the Chinese business community to expand its market abroad following the economic slowdown and also stimulate the domestic market.

He said that following the Sept 11 terrorist attacks on the United States, the Malaysian economy was only expected to achieve between one and two percent growth compared to earlier projection of between five and six percent.

As a result of the slowdown in the US, even before Sept 11, Malaysia would have to depend on the domestic market and that was the reason why the government increase salaries of civil servants by 10 percent effective next year, he said.

"The reason is for them to spend money in the country, buy goods and services domestically. The minimum RM1,000 bonus for them was to help retail trade in the country," he added.

About 1,000 businessmen attended the dinner.

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