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`Freedom of religion will not be curtailed'

KOTA KINABALU, Sat. - Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has reiterated that Malaysia's status as an Islamic country did not mean that freedom of religion will be curtailed.

Stressing that the Government valued the prevailing peace and harmony, he assured that the people would not be restricted from practising their respective religions or beliefs.

"There is no need for the people to fear the status of Malaysia as an Islamic country," he said when opening the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) 12th annual congress at the Magellan Sutera Hotel here.

He said that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement that Malaysia was an Islamic country would not involve changes to the law or amending the Constitution.

He said the Prime Minister was merely emphasising that Malaysia was already an Islamic country.

"We are aware of the concern raised by certain quarters, including BN component members, on the matter," he said while expressing the hope that his statement would once and for all erase any doubts on the issue.

The Government wants to see that the people continue to enjoy the fruits of development made possible because of the existing peace and harmony.

He noted the strong commitment of the BN component parties in Sabah to promote racial tolerance.

Abdullah also called on the people, especially those in the rural areas, to support development programmes implemented by the Government.

He said the Eighth Malaysia Plan gave special emphasis to rural development to ensure an equitable distribution of progress in urban and rural areas.

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