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Rais: All point to Malaysia as an Islamic State

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Provision in the Federal Constitution, the Syariah court system and the power of Sultans over administration of Islamic justice clearly point to the fact that Malaysia is an Islamic country.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim said today Article 3 of the Constitution stated that Islam was the religion of the Federation.

"What we maintain is that the Constitution is sufficient by itself because of Articles 3 and 11, therefore there is no necessity to meddle with that," Rais said.

Article 11 refers to the freedom of religion.

Rais said this after launching the Ampang Jaya Residents' Day celebrations at the Ampang Jaya multi-purpose hall here today.

Rais was asked to comment on DAP national chairman Lim Kit Siang's statement yesterday that former Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman had declared in Parliament that Malaysia was not an Islamic country.

Rais said what was stated decades ago by Tunku must be understood contextually.

"Even in the judiciary, especially the application of Syariah law, Malaysia has gone a long way from the Tunku days," Rais said.

He, however, added that the Government's definition of an Islamic State should not be confused with the assertion of Pas which wanted the nomenclature to be inserted in the Federal Constitution.

On DAP national deputy chairman Karpal Singh's statement that Article 3 of the Constitution should not be taken to mean that Malaysia was an Islamic country, Rais said that was Karpal's personal views and not those of the court.

"Article 3 is sufficient to warrant the fact that this country is Islamic in nature. But, this does not mean that the rights, privileges and positions enjoyed by other communities are affected adversely," said Rais, who is a lawyer by training.

Meanwhile, asked if Western countries had begun to realise the importance of the Internal Security Act in the light of the Sept 11 attacks in the United States, Rais said these nations were now less critical of the legislation than before.

He said that before the attacks in the United States even the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia vehemently attacked the ISA, but many quarters now were starting to realise how important preventive laws were.

Several countries, including the Czech Republic, recently turned to Malaysia to learn more about the ISA, Rais added.

"Even the United States is presenting its own version of preventive laws," said Rais.

In Penang, Lim said whether Malaysia was an Islamic State must be decided not just by Umno or Pas, but by all political parties and Malaysians, regardless of race, religion or party affiliation.

He said the failure to do so would be a grave infringement of the basic citizenship rights of non-Muslim Malaysians.

Lim said the claim that Malaysia was an Islamic State because it was member of the Organisation of Islamic Conference was also untenable "as surely it is not suggested that there are only 56 Islamic States in the world in keeping with the membership of the OIC".

"Does the Malaysian Government recognise countries like Iraq, Indonesia,

Uganda and Libya as Islamic States just because of their OIC membership?" he asked.

Information Ministry Parliamentary Secretary Datuk Zainuddin Maidin said Malaysia was never regarded as a secular State.

Criticising the DAP for questioning the Government's labelling of the country as an Islamic State, he said no secular State would approve laws advancing the interests of a particular religion.

"In this country, provisions for the development of other religions cannot be made by Parliament and the propagation of other religions through official government organs such as television and radio is not allowed.

"This has already been accepted as a convention," Zainuddin told Bernama.

He said the DAP leaders' reaction gave the impression that the party could not accept several laws concerning Islam approved by Parliament over the years.

In Nibong Tebal, MIC vice-president Datuk G. Palanivel said the Barisan Nasional component parties fully understood Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's explanation on the Islamic State issue.

He said the Opposition parties were the ones who were confused over the issue.

"The DAP was on the offensive because it wants to regain lost grounds for supporting Pas in the past," he said after launching a blood donation campaign organised by the Rantau Panjang MIC branch near here.

Palanivel, who is also Deputy Rural Development Minister, said it was time the small group of vociferous Indians in Parti Keadilan Nasional made their stand on the Pas-led opposition front.

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