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'Malaysia an Islamic state before Dr M's declaration'

PENANG, Sat. - Malaysia is an Islamic state and was one long before Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's declaration to this effect, acting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

He said Dr Mahathir's declaration was not a statement of intent but one of fact, adding that 90 per cent of the laws in the country were Islamic in nature and had been drafted long before the declaration.

Abdullah added that Malaysia was a multi-racial country where the Muslims had learnt to live in peace and harmony with non-Muslims who were guaranteed freedom of worship by the Federal Constitution.

The acting Prime Minister said the Barisan Nasional Government held strongly to the Federal Constitution and the Rukun Negara as a joint conviction by all component parties.

He said this at the close of a seminar on Malaysia as an Islamic state, jointly organised by the Penang State Secretariat, the Islamic Development Department (Jakim) and the Public Administration Institute (Intan).

Also present were Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon, his deputy Datuk Dr Hilmi Yahaya, State Secretary Datuk Khalid Ramli, Jakim director-general Datuk Mohamad Shahir Abdullah and State mufti Datuk Hassan Ahmad.

Dr Mahathir's declaration on Sept 29, 2001 that Malaysia was an Islamic state had been made with the consensus of all Barisan Nasional leaders, including non-Muslim ones, he said.

Among those present when the issue was being discussed were Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik and MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik.

"No single race in the country should expect to get everything it wants, without any consideration for other communities," he said.

For example, he said, Islamic education system was not implemented because non-Muslim children go to the same school.

However, he said, the Government had set up Bank Islam to provide banking services the Islamic way.

"It was not to deny others the right to normal banking services, but to offer alternative banking the Islamic way to Muslims.

"Now, even the commercial banks are offering similar Islamic banking services."

Abdullah said a Muslim should be able to live the life of a good Muslim in a mixed environment.

"A Muslim should be able to live as a good Muslim anywhere," he said.