

'Building bridges': M'sia's reputation intact

Malaysiakini.com

Jun 18, 2007

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The postponement of the 'Building Bridges' inter-faith conference in early May had not tarnished Malaysia's reputation, said Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Mohd Nazri Abdul Aziz today.

"No damage has been done to the country's international image and reputation because of this," he told the Dewan Rakyat.

"I just returned from meeting MPs from Geneva, London and Switzerland. No one asked me about the conference," he added.

Nazri (BN-Padang Renggas) was responding to a query from Opposition Leader Lim Kit Siang (DAP-Ipoh Timur).

Lim had asked the prime minister to state the measures taken to repair the damage to Malaysia's international reputation with the last minute 'cancellation' of the conference.

"The government has its own mechanism to ensure harmony among different races," said Nazri, citing Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's explanation of Islam Hadhari to non-Muslim countries like Australia, India and the United Kingdom.

"During the explanation, leaders of these countries are free to engage in dialogues with the PM and direct religious questions at him," he added.

Nazri also stressed that the conference was not cancelled but postponed as explained by Abdullah previously.

'Religious polarisation'

Dissatisfied, Lim asked Nazri if he is aware of the "serious religious polarisation" occurring in the country.

"Don't you think this (polarisation) proves the need of interfaith dialogues in our country?"

"We have been promoting dialogues at the international level, does it mean that Islam Hadhari seeks for interfaith dialogues but not in our country?" he asked further.

Replying, Nazri said: "The conference was not cancelled. It was postponed because the PM could not attend due to his other obligations."

"What is the point of holding an international conference in our country when our PM cannot attend it? We postponed it so that he (PM) can show his commitment for the conference," he added.

The "Building Bridges" Islam-Christianity International Conference, set up in the wake of the Sept 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the US, was scheduled to be held in Malaysia from May 7-11.

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