

No Bangsa Malaysia in Constitution, says Najib

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JOHOR BARU: Bangsa Malaysia only refers to the "state of mind" of being a Malaysian and is not a policy spelled out in the Constitution.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said all quarters should cease trying to define the term.

"It cannot be defined because there is no such thing as Bangsa Malaysia in the Constitution," he said when closing the two-day Johor Umno Convention here.

Johor party chief Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman had sparked a political debate on Monday when he said people who advocated Bangsa Malaysia were going against the Constitution. Ghani said the concept was unacceptable and could unsettle political stability in the country if pushed by groups with vested interests.

This drew a response from Gerakan party chief Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik, who said Johor Umno was going against government policy.

"Johor Umno can say what they want. It is their right to do so. (But) Bangsa Malaysia is a policy of the government. We (Gerakan) are supporting the policy of the government," said Dr Lim.

At its national delegates' conference in Kuala Lumpur on Sept 4, Gerakan had adopted a resolution urging Malaysians to promote the creation of a Bangsa Malaysia under Vision 2020.

Najib, who picked up the issue in his speech here yesterday, insisted that Bangsa Malaysia was only a general concept.

"There is no need to define it in detail, amend the Constitution or review government policy.

"I am more inclined to view Bangsa Malaysia as a state of mind to eradicate social prejudices and

differences among the races.

"If we accept this and avoid polemics on definition, we can avoid arousing controversies," he said.

Ghani also spoke again yesterday on Bangsa Malaysia, reaffirming Johor Umno's position that it referred to a "rojak" (a mishmash) of races in the country and was "ultra vires" (beyond the power) of the Constitution.

The concept is seen as a threat to Malays and their special position as provided for in the Constitution.

Ghani said there was no need to reinvent a national identity when the Constitution had defined the races that make up the citizens of this country.

"Johor Umno is not going against government policy by harping on this. Bangsa Malaysia has been misinterpreted and is being manipulated by some quarters for their own political motives.

"They are, in fact, echoing the concept of 'Malaysia for Malaysians' that was advocated by Lee Kuan Yew before Singapore's separation from Malaysia. This was the same concept that was later championed by the DAP.

"But the government has rejected it from the start. It was never accepted. It is not in the Constitution," he said.

Besides Bangsa Malaysia, another talking point among the delegates was the government's meritocracy system, the use of English for the teaching of Science and Mathematics in schools, the declining role of Bahasa Melayu as the language of knowledge, and economic opportunities for Bumiputeras under the recently-launched Iskandar Development Region.

Johor Umno, with nearly 500,000 members in 2,032 branches, is the biggest state Umno in the country.

The state, which is also the birthplace of Umno, has traditionally been the bastion of political strength in the country.

Meanwhile, Najib, speaking to the delegates yesterday, said the proposed Inter-Faith Commission (IFC) would never be established because it was an affront to Islam.

"When the Prime Minister said the setting up of the IFC had been postponed, he was being diplomatic. IFC will never be allowed as it goes against the status of Islam as the official religion of the country," he said.

Referring to education, he said the minister concerned, Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein, was compiling a study on the effectiveness of English as the medium of language for the teaching of Mathematics and Science.

He said the study would be completed by 2008. "We will then decide if we should continue or abort the programme," he said.