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MCA: We are a secular nation

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia is a secular state, insists the MCA.

It said the position was clear as evidenced by numerous historical documents, including the Reid Report, the Cobbold Commission and a 1988 Supreme Court decision.

After reviewing the documents used in the process of drafting the Federal Constitution, the party's secretary-general, Datuk Ong Ka Chuan, said Malaysia was a secular state based on the consensus and social contract agreed upon by the nation's forefathers.

"The documents showed that a secular state is the foundation of the formation of Malaya and this consensus was made by our forefathers," he said yesterday.

He said this in response to the statement by Deputy

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak on Monday that Malaysia is an Islamic nation that protects the rights of non-Muslims.

Citing an example, Ong said according to the Alliance's memorandum to the Reid Commission dated Sept 27, 1956, it was stated on Page 19 that "The religion of Malaya shall be Islam. The observance of this principle shall not impose any disability on non-Muslim nationals professing and practising their own religion, and shall not imply the state is not a secular state."

Ong said former prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj had said during a meeting on April 17, 1957, that "the whole constitution was framed on the basis that the federation would be a secular state".

Ong said notes prepared by the Colonial Office dated May

23, 1957, at the London Conference Talks mentioned that "the members of the Alliance delegation stressed that they had no intention of creating a Muslim theocracy and that Malaya would be a secular state".

Additionally, Ong stated that when former MCA president, Tun Tan Siew Sin spoke in parliament on July 10, 1957, in support of the Constitutional Bill, he said that although Islam would be the official religion, "this does not in any way derogate from the principle, which has always been accepted, that Malaya will be a secular state and that there will be a complete freedom to practise any other religion".

Ong added that all these documents showed a true picture of Malaysia, which is a secular nation.

MCA central committee member and Kota Melaka MP

Wong Nai Chee said Najib's interpretation was "not in accordance with the spirit and intent of the Federal Constitution".

He said that the issue of Malaya as a secular state was vigorously debated again during the 1962 Cobbold Commission before the entry of Sabah and Sarawak, forming Malaysia.

"Again, the secular nature of Malaysia was reiterated as having been stated in the Reid Commission. The secular nature of our Federal Constitution has been the basis for our nation building since 1957 and reinforced in 1963."

The Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism president, Datuk A. Vaithilingam, urged the government and all Malaysians to respect the social contract agreed to in 1957.

The council also strongly

objected to attempts by the government to change the status quo.

The Bar Council said that in the context of the country's history and the constitution itself that proclaimed its supremacy, there was no doubt whatsoever that Malaysia was a secular state.

"It is noteworthy that the prime minister in his speech delivered at the conference yesterday and in his propagating Islam Hadhari has never referred to Malaysia as an Islamic state," the council's president Ambiga Sreenevasan said.

"It is time that the proposition that Malaysia is not secular (which is a rewriting of the constitution), be put to rest once and for all and that there is due recognition and reaffirmation of the clear legal and constitutional position that Malaysia is, and has always been, a secular state."