

'M'sia Islamic state as Islam official religion'

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KUALA LUMPUR: Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak said yesterday Malaysia is not a secular state, but an Islamic state driven by the fundamentals of Islam.

"Islam is the official religion and Malaysia is an Islamic state; an Islamic state that respects the rights of the non-Muslims and we protect them," he said when asked to comment on concerns that Malaysia is moving from a secular government to an Islamic state, and whether Malaysia is one.

"I want to correct you (reporter); that we have never, never been a secular state. Secular by Western definition means separation of the Islamic principles in the way we govern the country," he said.

"But we have never abdicated from that principle. Malaysia has always been driven by, and adhere to, the fundamentals of Islam ... so your (reporter's) premise is wrong."

He was speaking to reporters after opening the Institute of Islamic

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Earlier, Najib read Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's speech.

To another question, Najib said the federal constitution provides Islam as the official religion in Malaysia and it does not want to be stereotyped

according to the Western definition of secular, non-secular, Islamic or non-Islamic.

Told that opposition party PAS has a different perception of an Islamic state, Najib said: "PAS has its own version and we have our own interpretation."

Asked about concerns that after Malaysia took over the chairmanship of OIC, nothing much was done to solve the problems in Iraq, he said there are two sides to OIC.

One is an economic face, which takes initiatives to hold forums and conferences in Malaysia for young entrepreneurs and women.

"The other side about Iraq involves major powers. Our ability to influence the major powers is somehow limited," he said.

On another matter concerning the free trade agreement with the United States, he said discussions are on-going and he is not sure if everything can be concluded before the expiry of the present US congress' term of office.