

Dr M says his 'Islamic country' declaration means he is not like DAP
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KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 10 — Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad reminded the public today that he had declared Malaysia an Islamic country in 2001 when he was still the prime minister, amid an uproar from Pakatan Rakyat (PR) over the declaration by Umno-aligned religious scholars that it was haram, or forbidden, for Muslims to support the secular DAP because it opposed Islamic rule.

Dr Mahathir (picture) also told reporters today that his opposition to hudud, which provides for harsh penalties for crimes such as the amputation of hands for theft, should also not be equated to that of the DAP.

"It is a question of hudud as interpreted by PAS ... that we cannot support.

"But I have declared Malaysia an Islamic country ... foreign countries also recognise us as an Islamic country," he said in response to questions about DAP being declared haram.

Dr Mahathir stoked controversy when he declared Malaysia an Islamic country in 2001 in an attempt to blunt the growing influence of PAS.

But the non-Muslim community was unhappy with his vague declaration with concerns raised about whether he had declared Malaysia an Islamic theocracy.

A year later Dr Mahathir said he did not consider Malaysia a moderate but a fundamentalist Muslim country.

Yesterday PR leaders slammed Malay daily Utusan Malaysia for stoking "religious conflict" after the Umno-owned paper ran a controversial report on its front page a day earlier titled "Haram sokong DAP" (Forbidden to support DAP).

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak was reported to have said last September that the federal government cannot enforce hudud because it had to consider the current realities in the multireligious country.

While Islam is recognised to be the religion of the federation, the Federal Constitution protects the rights of citizens to practise freely the religion of their choice.

Malaysia's system of governance is also largely secular in nature

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