

Secular or Islamic state? Neither, says Dr M
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KUALA LUMPUR, June 19 — Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who once declared Malaysia to be an Islamic country, now says it is neither an Islamic nor a secular state, but just an “ordinary state” with Islam as the official religion.

The former prime minister was reported by English daily *The Startoday* as saying that although Malaysia has been proclaimed as an Islamic country before, it did not mean that measure were needed to “make it Islamic”.

“We are just an ordinary state that recognises Islam as the official religion of the country, and we practise things that are not against the religion of Islam,” Dr Mahathir told *The Star* yesterday.

“We have declared ourself (sic) as an Islamic state before, but that does not mean that we have to do all kinds of other things to make it Islamic. There are so many Islamic states that don’t even declare they are Islamic and they don’t practise many of the things that are supposed to be associated with Islamic states,” he added.

The veteran politician also stressed that the Federal Constitution does not mention that Malaysia is a secular state.

“We never said this is a secular state either,” said Dr Mahathir.

The country’s longest-serving prime minister declared in 2001 that Malaysia is an Islamic state and went on to say in 2002 that Malaysia is an Islamic fundamentalist state.

Malaysia’s founding father Tunku Abdul Rahman, however, said in Parliament in 1958: “I would like to make clear that this country is not an Islamic State as it is generally understood, we merely provided that Islam shall be the official religion of the State”.

The debate over whether Malaysia - which has a dual track legal system of civil and shariah courts - is an Islamic or secular state arose again recently after a minister said last Monday that Malaysia is not the latter.

Datuk Seri Jamil Khir Baharom, Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department in charge of Islamic affairs, said his position was reinforced by several constitutional provisions, including Article 3 which places Islam as the religion of the federation.

Jamil Khir’s assertion works against a key argument against the implementation of hudud here, although he stopped short of declaring that Malaysia is an Islamic state.

DAP’s Sibu MP Oscar Ling Chai Yew has said that Malaysia is a secular state as three of the four signatories of the 1963 Malaysia Agreement — Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak

— did not have a state religion and this was further reinforced by the 18-point and 20-point agreements drawn up by Sarawak and Sabah respectively.

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