

PM believes in progressive Islam and one system of government

NEWS ANALYSIS By Brendan Pereira

PAS is right when it says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi does not want to openly engage it in a no-holds debate on the concept of an Islamic state.

He does not need to.

What he has been doing with little fanfare over the past few months is laying the groundwork for a progressive Islam that he believes Muslims here should embrace — one which stresses the importance of accumulating credits for the afterlife as well as excelling on earth.

Sieve through his recent speeches delivered throughout the country and only one conclusion can be reached: he rejects Pas' view of one system for Muslims and another for non-Muslims in multi-racial Malaysia.

This is spelt out clearly in the BN manifesto launched yesterday.

"We believe in a tolerant and progressive Islam ... There will be one system of government for all people. We will not tolerate divisiveness from extremism," read the manifesto.

Included in the manifesto was a pledge to continue to build a modern and progressive Islam Hadhari. Put simply, Islam Hadhari is an Islam that is complete and one that covers

all aspects of living including heaven and earth and development.

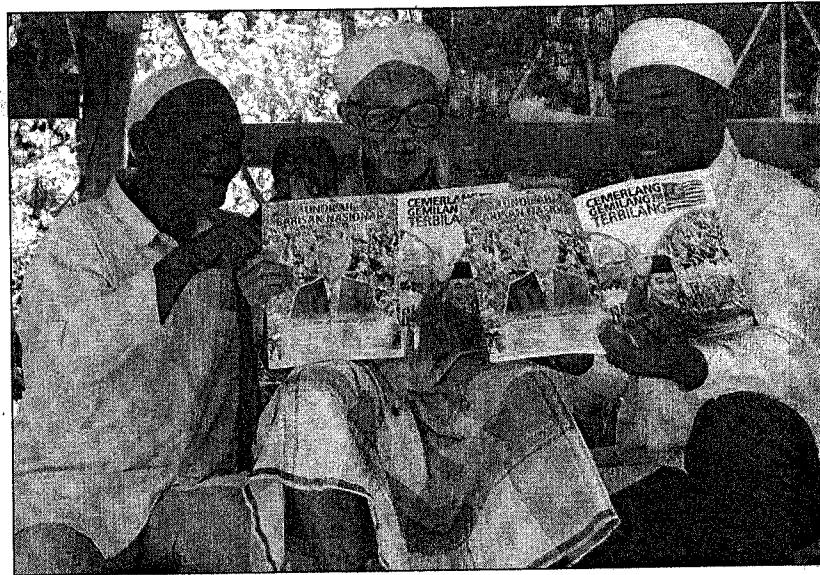
In a late night speech in Kangar on Tuesday, the Prime Minister told a crowd of 2,000 people that there were many Muslim countries in the world, all in search for the perfect Islamic system. Each one had a different administrative system and composition of people.

"We are thankful to God that when we look around, we are better than most," he said, drawing applause from the predominantly Malay crowd.

The central theme running through the 40-minute speech was this: heaven is important but Islam also expects its believers to strive hard on earth.

Every time he asserted a point, it was followed by a verse from the Quran.

He was not flaunting his religious knowledge but the effect on



PROMISE OF A BETTER FUTURE: Three friends, Che Lah Ismail (left), 80, Abu Bakar Harun (centre), 102, and Abu Hassan Samah, 44, reading the BN manifesto which was launched yesterday.

the ground was noticeable.

Khamsiah Yusof, 54, said: "Pak Lah knows what he is talking about. He does not attack Pas or say that their ideas are wrong."

What he does is cut through the

fluff and confusion which Pas has heaped on the religion over the years and simplify it for the average believer.

Last month in Shah Alam, quoting a verse from the Quran, he said God

asked his followers to strive to be fair to all humans.

"God never asked us to be fair only to Muslims and to treat non-Muslims unfairly," he said.

Abdullah also said the Islamisation of the country should start with the individual.

"We can Islamise anything but if we do not change as a person, it will not work," he said. Using corruption as an example, he said the scourge would not exist if Muslims treated it with the same disdain as they would with pork.

Datuk Pirdaus Ismail, former imam of Masjid Negara, endorsed the progressive nature of Islam Hadhari, saying that it captured the essence of the religion.

Still, Datuk Kamaruddin Jaafar, Pas candidate for Tumpat, poured scorn on Islam Hadhari, saying that it was not relevant in a country where social ills were mounting.

Only the Islamic state and hudud could provide a framework for a better life, he argued. He and other Pas leaders have been trying to goad the PM into a debate on the Islamic state.

Kamaruddin was previously an

Umno member and a key aide of former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim. He campaigned against Pas in several elections since 1982.

However, he quit Umno after Anwar was sacked in 1998 and joined Pas.

Despite the views expressed by Pas, Abdullah sees little need for a public debate.

Dr Chandra Muzaffar thinks this is the correct strategy.

"What he is trying to do is inculcate Islamic values in everyday life for everyone.

"He does not need to get involved with people who want to score political points.

"It is so important for the Prime Minister to get his message on Islam across.

"This is part of the larger challenge of getting Muslims here to embrace a brand of Islam that is more tolerant and progressive."

A nationwide survey commissioned by *The New Straits Times* and conducted by Universiti Utara Malaysia showed that 52 per cent of Malaysians preferred the PM's vision of Islam.