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Cabinet puts on hold gazettement of controversial Islamic Family Law Act

By JANE RITIKOS

PETALING JAYA: The gazettement of the controversial Islamic Family Law (Federal Territories) (Amendment) Act 2005 which was passed by Parliament last month has been put on hold.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz said the Cabinet meeting chaired by the Prime Minister yesterday wanted the objections voiced by various parties to be thoroughly discussed.



Nazri: 'We hope that something good will come out of this'

Several groups said the Act contained provisions that were unfair to women and enhanced Muslim men's rights in polygamy and divorce cases.

"The Cabinet takes the objections from the women seriously. Therefore, we really have to look at their views thoroughly, so, eventually, when we amend the Act, women will not feel discriminated against," Nazri said.

He also said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi wanted women's groups to work with the Government on the matter.

"He wants an in depth discussion as soon as possible," he said, adding that the Cabinet received two notes on the Act – one from Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, which included views from women's groups, and the other from the Attorney-General.

"However, we have to wait for Shahrizat to return from the haj. She is important in this issue. Later, she will have to meet the Sultans on amending the law."

The Act was submitted to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong on Dec 23 for royal assent. Should assent be given in the meantime, the Government will not set a date to gazette it, pending the discussion.

Asked why the Government had chosen to amend the law, Nazri explained that the Rulers Council had agreed that Islamic laws in the country be streamlined.

"We have to honour this part of the promise," he said.

The passing of the Act for the Federal Territories made it the 11th state in the country to adopt the law. The Bill had to be passed in Parliament as the Federal Territories does not have a state assembly.

"The Bill was passed and that in itself is still in the spirit of streamlining the Islamic laws. And, as I promised, we will work towards amending the law," said Nazri.

"We hope that something good will come out of this, not only for the Federal Territories. The idea was to pass the Bill and then push for amendments to the law.

"Hopefully, when the Sultans agree, we will have the same protection for all women, not only in the Federal Territories but also in all states," he said.

IZATUN SHARI reports that Sisters in Islam (SIS) described the move not to gazette the amended Islamic Family Law for the Federal Territories as a positive step towards having a more comprehensive law that is just and equal.

However, its programme manager Zaitun Mohamed Kasim said there should be a moratorium of the law in states which had gazetted it since 2003.

“Women in other states, except in Kedah and Terangganu which have not gazetted the law, have been subject to this law for the past few years,” she said.

She said SIS has also called for the setting up of a Parliamentary Select Committee on Islamic Family Law to gather the views of women and non-governmental organisations dealing with women’s issues.

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