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20 divorce-via-SMS cases heard in Selangor Syariah court since 1999

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SHAH ALAM, Thurs. - The hotly-debated divorce-via-SMS case which made headlines in Gombak earlier this year was not the first to be heard in a Syariah court.

Since 1999, 20 similar cases have appeared before the Selangor Syariah court.

State Syariah chief judge Datuk Zohdi Toha, who revealed this today, said out of the 20, some had been rejected while a number of marriages had been annulled.

Zohdi was speaking at the launch of the Syariah Lower Court, the State e-syariah and a one-day seminar on Islamic law by the Sultan of Selangor Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah.

The event, at the Shah Alam Club, was attended by Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Khir Toyo, State leaders and senior government officials.

Divorce through SMS (short message service) attracted attention in July when the Gombak Syariah court declared the method valid, provided that there was verification by the court.

This led to a raging public debate, with many insisting that divorce via SMS was an insult to women.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had expressed concern, saying that serious matters like marital problems and divorce should be handled in person.

The Cabinet on July 30 decided that it was not right for Malaysian Muslim men to divorce their wives by merely sending text messages via mobile telephones as it was contrary to their culture and against the spirit of the syariah.

It also planned to pass new laws to prevent divorce pronouncements via the SMS and other modern technologies like e-mail and fax.

Zohdi claimed divorce via SMS had taken place in other States, but the ones in Selangor received wider publicity.

Syariah judges, he said, would not blindly accept complaints of divorce via the SMS.

"They would listen to both parties (husbands and wives) before making any decision."

Zohdi also announced that Selangor Syariah Court would now be known as Jabatan Kehakiman Syariah Selangor.