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PM disapproves of SMS divorce

CYBERJAYA, Tues. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is not keen on the use of the short messaging service (SMS) by Muslims to divorce their wives.

Clearly stating his disagreement with the contention that a marriage could be nullified via a SMS message, he said serious matters like marital problems and divorce should be handled in a more personal way.

"Of course, nowadays, we can even divorce our wives (using SMS). I'm not so keen on that. They say that it is perfectly legal and perfectly Islamic but I think if people want to divorce their wives, they should resort to a much more personal approach.

"We hope, of course, that instead of sending messages he would look at the picture of his beautiful wife (on the phone screen), call and talk to her over the phone.

"Maybe she will cry and you will retract the move (to divorce). This is progress (in the right direction)," Dr Mahathir said at the opening of Ericsson's regional hub and its Malaysian headquarters, Ericsson@MSC, here this morning.

Dr Mahathir said that although the evolution of technology had enabled better communication, it should not be used for the wrong reasons.

The Gombak Syariah Court ruled on Thursday that a divorce declared via SMS was valid, provided it was verified by the court.

East Gombak Syariah judge Mohamad Fauzi Ismail ruled that the 18-month marriage between Azida Fazlina Abdul Latif and Shamsudin Latif was annulled when Shamsudin sent Azida Fazlina a SMS stating "Kalau engkau tak keluar dari rumah mak bapak engkau, jatuh talak tiga (If you do not leave your parents' house, you will be divorced)".

In Port Dickson, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the Department of Islamic Development (Jakim) should state its stand on talak via SMS.

He said he could understand the worries expressed by women.

Anyone could send such messages. Cheating could occur as SMS did not bear signatures.

"Jakim should handle this matter meticulously. Orang tak nampak, muka tak nampak, tiba-tiba datang SMS kena cerai (the person is not seen, face not seen, suddenly a SMS message comes through announcing the divorce).

"I understand the worries expressed by women ...Kemungkinan ditipu melalui SMS (maybe they are being cheated via SMS). This is a matter pertaining to hukum (rule). So, Jakim must make itself clear on the matter," he said after opening the RM12 million Armed Forces Institute of Islamic training and Understanding (Ilmi) near here.

Women and Family Development Minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil said she would raise the matter in Cabinet tomorrow.

She said it was unethical for husbands to pronounce talak via the SMS although the method was accepted under the syariah law.

"Upon seeking a woman's hand in marriage, all proper means and methods are used. If you intend to divorce your wife, please at least have the courtesy to say it to her face," she said after attending the Sisters of Islam fundraising campaign and publication launch at the Islamic Arts Museum here today.

"If it is illegal to terminate a person's employment via SMS, then how can we allow a husband to terminate a marriage via SMS?"

National Unity and Social Development Minister Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah

Sulaiman had stated that the sanctity of the institution of marriage should not be disregarded.

An opposite view has been expressed by Religious Adviser to the Prime Minister, Tan Sri Abdul Hamid Othman, who said talak via SMS was acceptable as it was in accordance with syariah principles.