

MPs coy over stand on unilateral conversions

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By Koh Jun Lin

PAS parliamentarians are withholding their judgment on the Administration of Islamic Law (Federal Territories) Act Amendment Bill 2013, while other Muslim MPs want more discussions on the controversial move.

NONE "We (PAS) have yet to make a final decision because the government itself is unsure (on the bill)," PAS vice-president Mahfuz Omar (right in photo) told Malaysiakini at the Parliament lobby yesterday.

"There is no party stance because we don't even know which one is correct - the bill or the cabinet decision (of 2009)" Mahfuz said when asked about controversial Clause 107B in the bill.

The proposed clause states that the consent of one parent is sufficient to convert a minor to Islam, which critics say contradicts a 2009 cabinet directive that the consent of both parents are required.

Asked for his personal view, the Pokok Sena MP said he would wait for the contradictions to be clarified before taking a position on the amendment.

Approached separately, Kuala Krai MP Dr Mohd Hatta Ramli, also from PAS, echoed Mahfuz's views.

"This is a national issue. No personal views," Hatta said.

Kuala Terengganu MP Raja NONEBahrin Shah Raja Ahmad (left) told Malaysiakini that it would be awkward to comment on the bill now as the issue may not even arise.

It would therefore be better to wait for Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak to clarify the matter upon his return from his working trip overseas.

Raja Kamrul also said he would refrain from commenting on the religious aspect of the issue until the PAS Ulama Council has given its interpretation on the controversy.

Umno MPs await briefing

As for BN, the coalition's Backbencher's Club (BNBBC) chairperson Shahrir Abdul Samad said its MPs were still waiting for the minister responsible, Jamil Khir Baharom, to explain the bill to them.

"Then, we will have our discussions and we will make our decision. We don't make decisions without discussing, right?" Shahrir said.

Thus far, he said, there has been no meeting on the matter and the minister in charge of Islamic affairs had yet to call for one.

NONEFor Setiawangsa MP Ahmad Fauzi Zahari (right), who also seeks Jamil's explanation, the interests of the children in this matter are of paramount importance.

If parents come to a deadlock on the child's religion, he suggested they should resolve this amicably, through arbitration, and possibly with a cooling-off period in the hope that both parents are able to reconcile their views.

The first-term Umno MP also expressed concern that the amendment could be viewed by non-Muslims as imposing Islam on them. A number of non-Muslim MPs in the BN ruling coalition has voiced out their opposition against the bill.

However, Ahmad Fauzi stressed that he has yet to read the amendment bill in full, and would prefer to leave religious issues to the experts.

No compulsion in Islam

Meanwhile, Lembah Pantai MP Nurul Izzah Anwar described the bill as 'half-baked'.

Nurul Izzah said the bill needed to be discussed further with stakeholders and NGOs, in particular its possible implications and whether it was in line with the teachings of Prophet Muhammad.

She said there should be no compulsion in religion and faith should come from a person's heart, rather than be imposed on the individual.

The PKR vice-president added that she understands the need of some Muslims to ensure the faith and moral position of Islam is defended at its "utmost".

NONE"However, there are different ways to do this and what is important is that it is predicated with sincerity and it must come from the heart," Nurul Izzah (right) told Malaysiakini.

Another PKR MP, Fauzi Abdul Rahman, added that there should be dialogue with religious leaders on the issue, including those from religions other than Islam.

"Although Islam is the official religion, we have to consult them," he said.

He also said he heard from government officials that BN may withdraw the controversial bill, but was unsure of the veracity of this claim.

Zairil Khir Johari (3)Meanwhile, DAP's Bukit Bendera MP Zairil Khir Johari (left) issued a closely guarded response when approached on the issue.

"I think I'll echo my party," Zairil said when asked for his personal view on the bill, and declined further comment.

He referred to DAP chairperson Karpal Singh's statement earlier yesterday. Karpal called for the federal constitution to be amended so as to put the issue of unilateral conversions to rest.

Karpal also said that a court decision often cited to make the case that unilateral conversions are constitutionally valid was

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