

Interfaith disputes: Dialogue with PM 'good enough'
Malaysiakini.com
April 10, 2007
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While the government has suspended its plan to form an interfaith council, a minister told Parliament that dialogue sessions with the prime minister are enough to solve existing problems.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Mohd Nazri Abdul Aziz said the government has suspended the interfaith council plan due to 'racial controversies'.

"For the time being, we can have dialogue sessions with the premier and this is sufficient to solve problems concerning race and religion," he said.

More steps will be employed to enhance the effectiveness of these dialogue sessions, he added.

But Opposition Leader Lim Kit Siang (DAP-Ipoh Timur) argued that the dialogue sessions have not been successful, especially in the past 18 months since the M Moorthy case.

"The prime minister promised to be more sensitive towards the rights of other races and religions, but the situation is worse now," he said.

He said this was illustrated in the desperate move by a council of religions to hold a week-long prayer session for R Subashini, a Hindu housewife locked in a custody battle with her husband who had converted to Islam.

Nazri said he understands the situation but noted that the interfaith council will not be able to solve all the problems.

"The majority of Muslims do not want to join the council. How can we form the council when one race is against it?" he asked.

Lim then questioned why it is not possible to set up the council when during the 50s and 60s, the country had an inter-religious council headed by prime ministers.

"Are we amending the civil laws so that they are in accordance to syariah laws?" he asked.

"Why can't the government be more open? Is it because Malaysia is becoming an Islamic country?" he added.

Meet PM twice a year

To this, Nazri replied that he has not received any reports of civil laws being amended and the government has never compromised on matters concerning other religions.

Tan Seng Giaw (DAP-Kepong) then asked if there is any other way to solve this crisis.

"Non-Muslims are not always the root of the problem, sometimes it is the Muslims and we need a channel to enable the public to have their complaints heard," he said.

Nazri reiterated that the dialogue sessions with the prime minister are sufficient.

"Maybe we can create a schedule, which will allow the public to meet the premier twice a year," he said.

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/65743>