

Government mulls commission for religious disputes

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The government may create a special commission to hear disputes involving Muslims and non-Muslims following a series of cases that have raised racial and religious tensions.

Nazri Abdul Aziz, minister in the prime minister's department, said the attorney-general was working on setting up a commission to arbitrate in religious disputes.

"The aim is to resolve the problems which have arisen and may arise in the future as a result of interfaith problems, problems like conversion and all that, which have occurred many times now," Nazri told AFP.

The proposal comes amid growing anger from minority religious groups, who say their rights are being undermined in legal battles involving Muslims and non-Muslims.

Legal disputes

Malaysia has a dual-court system, with civil courts as well as Islamic or syariah courts for Muslims in areas of personal law, such as divorce.

However, there is increasing confusion in legal disputes involving both Muslims and non-Muslims over which system has jurisdiction.

In one recent case, an ethnic Indian Hindu woman whose husband converted to Islam is fighting to have her divorce resolved in a civil court, after being told to go to a sharia one.

An ethnic Malay woman, Lina Joy, who converted from Islam to Christianity, has also been battling for over a decade for official recognition of her conversion.

A final ruling from the nation's highest court on her case has been delayed amid concerns over possible fallout from Muslim groups, who accuse Joy of trying to undermine Islam.

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