

ISLAMIC FAMILY LAW ACT ON HOLD: PM calls for another round of discussion, amendments possible
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PUTRAJAYA, Jan 11: This is the news Muslim women here had been hoping and praying for. The Cabinet today decided not to gazette the controversial Islamic Family Law Act, a piece of legislation which women argued would have led to an erosion of their rights and made it easier for Muslim men to practise polygamy or divorce their wives.

Instead, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has called for another round of discussions with the possibility of amending the Act.

Both the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry and the Attorney-General's Chambers have put forward notes on the Act, discussed at today's Cabinet meeting.

"Today we decided not to gazette this Act just yet," Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz said.

"The PM wants us first to look at the two notes and come back to discuss this very thoroughly. He is very concerned about this."

The Cabinet will wait for Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Jallil to return from Mecca before discussing the matter further.

Nazri said although it was a matter of "great urgency" for Abdullah, the Prime Minister did not want discussions to proceed without Shahrizat as her ministry had strenuously objected to the Act.

"It is urgent," Nazri said. "The PM wants this done quickly, and whatever decision we make at Federal level, Shahrizat will have to meet with the Rulers because this law is not only to be implemented in the Federal Territory but in all the States, should there be a decision to amend it."

Abdullah had also asked that Shahrizat consult non-governmental organisations for their views on the Act.

"He wants unity and for the NGOs to help her present a united front to overcome the controversy," Nazri said.

Despite protests by women senators and NGOs, the Bill was recently passed in Parliament with the Government saying amendments could be made later. The Act is now with the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong, who can give his royal assent, but it will not come into force until gazetted.

Source:

http://www.nst.com.my/Current_News/nst/Thursday/Frontpage/20060112064604/Article/index_html