

Best for Inter-Faith Council to liaise with PM, says Nazri

NST- 11/4/2007.

THE proposed Inter-Faith Council should raise issues involving Islam with the prime minister in the absence of Muslim representation in the panel.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz said this may be necessary as Muslims did not want to sit on the council.

"The alternative would be for the IFC to take its concerns and issues with the prime minister," he said while replying to points raised by MPs during the debate on the Royal Address.

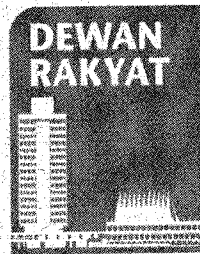
He said the prime minister, being the head of government and leader of the country, was in a position to do something about matters raised by the council.

"He can take action on their concerns or provide answers on issues raised by them. He is the best person for the IFC to deal with."

Nazri said the Malaysian Consultative Council on Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism was currently meeting the prime minister on an ad-hoc basis.

"Maybe this arrangement could be formalised with the proposed IFC meeting the prime minister twice a year to bring up issues or concerns."

On the absence of Muslim representation in the council, he said Muslims did not want to sit on the panel.



■ Reports by V. Vasudevan, Fay Angela D'Cruz and Mazlinda Mahmood

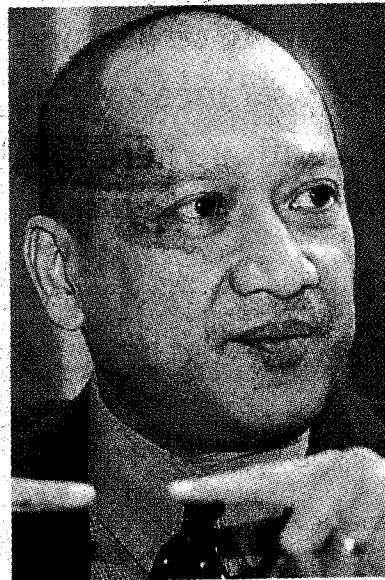
He said no one could force Muslims to do so against their will. Nazri said it was not right for the opposition to blame the government or ministers for refusing to support the IFC and ensure Muslim participation.

He pointed out it was politically impractical for Muslim ministers as the IFC did not have the support of the Muslims.

"Take me for example. I have 70 per cent Muslim or Malay voters in my constituency who are bound to register their unhappiness at the ballot box.

"Of course, the remaining 30 per cent of voters may approve if I supported the IFC," he told Lim, stressing that practical political considerations also had to be taken into account.

"If my constituents don't want the IFC, what am I to do?



The prime minister can take action on their concerns or provide answers on issues raised by them. He is the best person for the IFC to deal with.

*Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz
Minister in the
Prime Minister's Department*

Don't blame me. Don't blame ministers. Blame the voters," he told opposition leader Lim Kit Siang.

On claims by Lim that the leadership of the country had steadily become intolerant of other religions after independence, he said this was an incorrect assumption.

"Just because there is no Muslim participation in the IFC does not mean the government is intolerant or insensitive."

On Dr Tan Seng Giaw's (DAP-Kepong) contention that Muslim participation in the IFC was required to help the panel act as a forum to settle sensitive issues, Nazri said the IFC could still bring their concerns to the prime minister.

On Lim's statement that efforts were afoot to allegedly align several civil laws with Syariah, Nazri said he had not heard of any such move.

Lim had alleged that today's cabinet meeting would be dis-

cussing a paper on the matter.

Later in the lobby, Nazri said he had not seen or heard about such a cabinet paper.

"Even if it was to be discussed, this does not mean that it would be approved. Component party chiefs are also members of the cabinet and surely the cabinet will consider their views and objections.

"Muslim ministers will also want to give their input on any such proposal."