

IFC needs support of all, says Nazri

At the Dewan Rakyat

by B. Suresh Ram
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

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KUALA LUMPUR: The proposed formation of an Inter-Faith Commission (IFC) will need the participation of all religious communities, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Mohd Nazri Abdul Aziz said.

Claiming that the Muslim community was against its formation and participating in it, Nazri said it was unfair for the Opposition to blame the government for not supporting the IFC.

"If Muslims do not want to participate, how can you force them to participate voluntarily? Participation in the IFC should be voluntary ... no one can force Muslims to sit on the IFC," he said in his remarks during a debate on the motion of thanks for the royal address.

Nazri suggested, however, that the prime minister, as head of the executive, could be involved in such a commission.

"This is because the prime

minister is also a Malay and a Muslim, enabling him to represent the community and the people," he said.

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

Two years ago, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi told the proponents of the IFC, which included Muslim groups and individuals, to put their idea on hold because of objections from other Muslim groups.

The proposed commission would have been a world's first and was meant to be an independent body of an advisory, consultative and conciliatory nature.

"It is just politically impractical for Muslims in the government to support the setting up of the IFC if it did not have the support of the Muslim community," Nazri said.

"Take me, for example. I have 70% Muslim/Malay voters who are bound

to register their unhappiness through the ballot box. Of course, the remaining 30% of my voters may approve, if I supported the IFC.

"If my constituents don't want the IFC, what am I to do? Don't blame me. Don't blame the ministers. Blame my voters."

Instead, Nazri said, there was a need to review the existing inter-religious meeting with the prime minister with the view of making it a more permanent mechanism.

"Maybe this arrangement could be formalised in the 'style' of a commission and they could meet the prime minister twice a year to raise their concerns," he said.

He said such a commission, comprising heads of religious bodies including the mufti, could meet and resolve issues that are "personal and extra-judicial in nature".

On allegations that the attorney-general (AG) has submitted a proposal to the cabinet to streamline civil and family laws to resolve

syariah-related issues, Nazri said he had not heard of any such plans.

"Even if it was discussed, it does not mean it will 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 proposal," he said.

Nazri said the government would not fast-track a solution on legal conflicts brought about by the M. Moorthy and Rayappan Anthony court cases.

Reiterating that there would be no change to Article 121(A)

of the Federal Constitution, Nazri said the AG has been tasked to come up with a solution on the issues related to the conflict of jurisdiction between the civil and syariah courts.

"Any solution reached must take into account the sensitivity of the matter," he said.

On the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA), Nazri said any move to place the agency under Parliament would be impractical.

"Ninety-two percent of Parliament is made up of BN members. Thus, whoever controls Parliament would control the ACA," he said.