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PM: BN will decide on Pas' bill

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BN PRINCIPLE:

Barisan will stick to consensus rule before decision is made, says Najib

**ARNAZ M. KHAIRUL
AND ADRIAN LAI**
KUALA LUMPUR
news@nst.com.my

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak yesterday made it clear that Barisan Nasional component parties will need to reach a consensus on Pas' private member's bill to amend the Syariah Courts (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act 1965 before deciding to support or reject it.

"We are bound by the BN consensus and I want to state that we will stick by this principle.

"Before we do anything, we need to think about the interests of the country as a whole," Najib, who is also BN chairman, said at a press conference after chairing an Umno Supreme Council meeting here yesterday.

He added that BN would reach a consensus on the need to strengthen the existing jurisdictions of the Syariah courts before making a decision on the matter.

Najib said this following a joint statement by four BN component parties yesterday, in which they strongly opposed the moving of a motion to table the bill in Parliament on Thursday, saying it went against the spirit of the Federal Constitution.

Kedah state executive councillor Datuk Dr Leong Yong Kong also resigned from MCA yesterday as a mark of protest against the bill.

The prime minister said there was



Prime Minister **Datuk Seri Najib Razak** at a press conference after chairing the Umno Supreme Council meeting at Menara Dato' Onn in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. With him is Deputy Prime Minister **Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi**. Pic by Sairien Nafis

actually a "big" misunderstanding among BN component parties regarding the bill, which was submitted by Pas president and Marang member of parliament Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang.

"We have informed our partners in BN that there has been a big misunderstanding... they feel that the bill submitted by him (Hadi) is the hudud law itself.

"I want to explain that the bill is

not about hudud.

"It is about introducing enhanced punishments," he said.

The bill, said Najib, sought to replace existing provisions in the Syariah court's criminal jurisdiction and to allow several categories of punishments to be meted out.

Najib referred to the proposed strengthening of Section 2 of the law, which currently allows Syariah courts at all levels to mete out max-

imum punishments of three years' jail, RM5,000 fine or six strokes of the rotan.

"These punishments will only involve Muslims and have nothing to do with non-Muslims".

Najib added that under Islamic law, caning was meted out via methods that did not inflict severe injuries.

"But this does not mean that the (enhanced punishments) can be

easily enforced because they require the approval of the states' religious councils, the Council of Rulers and the amendment of laws in Parliament."

Hadi was due to table the contentious bill in Parliament on Thursday, but requested for a postponement due to time constraints.

This marks the fourth time Pas has pushed for the bill, which it has been doing so since 1995.