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PM: My hands are tied

> Govt can prohibit unilateral conversions if it has two-thirds majority, says Najib

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KUALA LUMPUR: The government needs a two-thirds majority to amend the Federal Constitution to ban unilateral conversions, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak.

He said the government has tried to enact laws to prohibit unilateral conversions, but it was bound by the Constitution.

He was referring to Clause 88A, which was removed from an amendment to a marriage reform law in Parliament recently because it contravenes Article 12(4) regarding the religion of a child in Malaysia.

"We need maturity to change the

Constitution, we need a two-thirds majority ... and I don't have the two-thirds majority.

"But if the women can give us the two-thirds majority, then maybe it's possible," Najib said when concluding the TN50 Dialogue with women groups here yesterday.

He was responding to a question by the National Council for Women's Organisation (NCWO) on putting back Clause 88A in the Law Reform (Marriage and Divorce) (Amendment) Bill 2016 (LRA).

"Talk is cheap. But if I as the PM say something, I will make sure I keep my word and fulfil my promise," Najib said, adding that not everything that people ask for can be fulfilled.

He said aspirations need to be practical and that he is not a leader who would promise anything and everything.

During the dialogue organised by the Women, Family and Community

Development Ministry, NCWO representatives also raised concerns on child marriage and lack of women representation in the legislative body.

The amendments to the LRA initially contained Clause 88A on the religion of the child, which allows the child to remain in his or her religion despite the conversion of one parent to Islam - the same clause that would prohibit unilateral conversions of minors when a parent decides to convert to Islam.

However, the clause was removed because there are four court decisions - three from the Federal Court and one from the Court of Appeal - binding the interpretation of "parent" as singular in Article 12(4) of the Federal Constitution.

Article 12(4) of the Constitution states that the religion of a person under the age of 18 shall be decided by his or her parent or guardian.

A fresh LRA bill, minus Clause 88A, was tabled in Parliament last month and was passed.

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