

States urged to change their marriage laws

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PUTRAJAYA: The Federal Government is stepping up its efforts to get the states' to change their laws on child marriage and to raise the marrying age to 18 nationwide.

Deputy Women, Family and Community Development Minister Hannah Yeoh said the government would also engage with non-Muslims, the Orang Asli and natives of Sabah and Sarawak in order to get every community onboard to stop child marriages.

"Getting states' consent to change the law is only for the one that affects Muslim marriages.

"Our data, however, shows that customary marriages in Sabah and Sarawak are equally high. Underage marriage is also high among the non-Muslims too.

"So we are reaching out to tell the Orang Asli and the natives of Sabah and Sarawak, about customs that they have been practising for a long time to increase the awareness on why child marriages must be prevented," she said after the launch of the National Strategy Plan in Handling the Causes of Child Marriage.

Yeoh said the plan works as a roadmap to ensure that all agencies involved in its execution were on-board with the government's plan to eradicate child marriage.

"In addressing these issues we have to come against state laws, customary laws, existing practices and more.



Positive steps: Dr Wan Azizah (third from left) and Yeoh (right) at the launching of the plan to tackle child marriage.

"So it is important that everyone understands this vision," she said, adding that so far Selangor has increased the legal marrying age for Muslims to 18, while in the Federal Territories, it was in the process of being amended.

Penang, Sabah, Johor, Melaka and Perak have also agreed to amend their laws on the matter while seven other states – Sarawak, Pahang, Terengganu, Perlis, Negri

Sembilan, Kedah and Kelantan – have not agreed to amend theirs.

Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Fuziah Salleh also said the government had introduced guidelines which made it compulsory for applications for underage Muslim marriages to be heard at the Syariah High Court.

"As we are working towards increasing the legal marrying age in

other states, this is a temporary decision to make sure parents don't simply marry off their kids.

"Parents must present medical and mental health reports from healthcare officials and the Social Welfare Department to the court.

"They would also be interviewed by Syariah High Court judges to determine the underlying factors surrounding their applications," she said.