

'CHANGES TO ACT 355 CANNOT BE RUSHED'

Amendment process should take into account views of all parties, says PM

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Amendments to the Syariah Courts (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act 1965 (Act 355) should not be made in haste and must take into account the views of international syariah law experts, said Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

The prime minister yesterday said the process of the amendments should be made in detail and take into consideration the views of all parties, including syariah courts, civil courts and international legal experts.

He said he had an audience with former Malaysian National Council for Islamic Religious Affairs (MKI) chairman Sultan of Selangor Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah to continue discussions over Act 355.

Anwar also had an audience with new MKI chairman, Sultan of Perak Sultan Nazrin Muizzuddin Shah, last week.

"They both consented to the initial framework that was presented by the expert committee.

"This was conveyed to Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Religious Affairs) Datuk Dr Mohd Na'im Mokhtar. Sultan Nazrin has expressed his readiness to discuss it at the (MKI) meeting this August."

Anwar said this in his speech at the Upholding the Syariah Law and Judiciary in Malaysia convention here.

He said the matter should be reviewed carefully to ensure that amendments to Act 355 did not appear to have significant weaknesses.

"We want it to be done properly because once it is presented, it becomes a strong document that would be agreed on by all states, mufti and scholars.

"We should make sure that the amendments are thorough and comprehensive so that their im-



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim speaking at the Upholding the Syariah Law and Judiciary in Malaysia convention in Putrajaya yesterday. PIC BY MOHD FADLI HAMZAH

plementation will not be questioned and the arguments will cover all aspects.

"I have asked Jakim (Malaysian Islamic Development Department) and Na'im to coordinate efforts to seek the views of international syariah law experts."

He said the preliminary study on Act 355 would be presented to the MKI next month.

"(However) it cannot be finalised yet. In my discussion with the sultan of Perak, he suggested that it should ideally be taken to international syariah legal experts to be discussed."

At the same time, he said this review was not an excuse to delay or undermine previous efforts, but to improve them as there were weaknesses in the provisions.

In April, it was reported that the government was preparing documentation concerning the proposed amendments to Act 355 for submission to the MKI.

Na'im said the discussions and consultations with the state Islamic religious agencies to improve the act had been concluded.

Amendments have been mullied on Act 355, which provides that syariah courts are empowered to impose maximum sentences of imprisonment not exceeding three years, a fine not exceeding RM5,000, or whipping not exceeding six strokes or with any combination thereof for offences under the Islamic law.

On a separate issue, Anwar said

he would meet the family of the late Teoh Beng Hock to review their memorandum demanding justice over his death.

"I am aware of the incident that occurred outside Parliament today (yesterday) involving the family of the late Teoh Beng Hock. I assure you that I will meet with them soon and review their memorandum," he said in a post on X.

Teoh's body was discovered on the fifth-floor landing of Plaza Masalam in Shah Alam on July 16, 2009.

He was earlier questioned overnight by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission officers on the 14th floor.

At the time, Teoh was the political aide to the then-Selangor executive councillor Ean Yong.

A Royal Commission of Inquiry in July 2011 ruled suicide as the cause of death.

In September 2014, however, the Court of Appeal ruled that Teoh's death was caused by multiple injuries from a fall from the building that was accelerated by "an unlawful act or acts of a person or persons unknown".

In May 2015, the government agreed to pay Teoh's family RM600,000 as a settlement for a civil suit initiated in 2012 for negligence resulting in his death.

Teoh's parents filed for a judicial review to compel the police to complete investigations into his death.

The hearing resumes on July 29.