

**Syariah Amendment Bill Will Be Tabled For Second Reading This Week - Zahid
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KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 22 (Bernama) -- The Private Member's Bill to amend the Syariah Courts (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act 1965 (RUU355) will be tabled for second reading in the Dewan Rakyat this week, said Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

He said the motion to table RUU355 would be moved by Marang MP and PAS president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang.

"The government will also propose that a Parliamentary Select Committee be formed on it that would involve both Muslim and non-Muslim MPs.

"This to go through the bill through a fine tooth comb to clarify areas that are not clear pertaining to the separation of powers of the Syariah and Civil courts," he said.

Ahmad Zahid, who is also Barisan Nasional (BN) Chief Whip, told this to reporters after attending a briefing on the RUU355 given by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Jamil Khir Baharom at Parliament House today.

The bill moved by Abdul Hadi had come up for first reading on May 26.

The motion by Abdul Hadi had been placed at number four in the meeting regulations on the first day of Dewan Rakyat sitting but did not get the chance to be tabled or debated as the sequence often jumbled up.

The Dewan Rakyat sitting which started on Oct 17 will end on Thursday.

Among other things, the bill was to amend Section 2 to replace the provisions of the existing legislation, namely, the Syariah Court will have power over Muslims and in matters of offences under those listed in item 1 of the State List, under the ninth schedule of the Federal Law.

It is also to include Section 2A, which states that in the conduct of criminal law under Section 2A, the Syariah Courts have the right to impose penalties allowed by Syariah laws related to offences listed in the said section, except for the death penalty.

Abdul Hadi insisted in May that his private member's bill aimed to expand the range of punishments the Shariah courts can impose, and was not meant to introduce hudud law in Kelantan.

Ahmad Zahid explained that the one-hour briefing, attended by both BN and opposition members of parliament (MPs), was held after there were various interpretations on the motion of the private member's bill when it was brought to Parliament before this.

"First of all, these laws are specifically for Muslims and secondly, no provisions in the civil court will be taken over by the shariah courts with such amendments, except that it is only to empower the shariah courts.

"Thirdly, with this committee, all matters and aspects that have been the concerns of non-Muslim MPs, be they in BN or the opposition, will be looked into in detail," he said.

Ahmad Zahid also said that the government respected the sensitivities of non-Muslims and that there was no intention to polemicise the issue, let alone to disturb the religious diversity in the country.

Meanwhile, Tan Sri Abdul Khalid Ibrahim (Independent-Bandar Tun Razak) when met the reporters described the briefing as very significant and productive for all quarters.

"I think the important thing is the implementation, in terms of acceptance of the shariah court but that is up to Parliament's approval. The decision on implementing the laws will be determined by the respective state assemblies," he said.

Datuk Dr Mohd Khairuddin Aman Razali (PAS-Kuala Nerus) said all opposition parties agreed and did not object to the issue.

"The harmonious discussion was well-received by all, this is for the betterment of Islam and (it) should continue like this," he said.

Meanwhile, Datuk Abdullah Sani (PKR-Kuala Langat) said that there were several MPs throwing in ideas on the number of strokes that should be imposed on shariah offenders.

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