

**'Don't Jump the Gun' Over Private Member's Bill - Zahid
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KUCHING, Nov 24 (Bernama) -- The question of voting for or against the Private Member's Bill seeking amendments to the Syariah Courts (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act 1965 does not arise as yet, said Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

All quarters should not jump the gun over the Bill to be brought by PAS president and Marang MP Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang because the process had not reached that stage yet, he said.

According to the Dewan Rakyat order paper, Hadi is scheduled to table a motion Thursday to seek the approval of the house to table the pertinent Private Member's Bill.

Ahmad Zahid said that even if that motion was approved, it would not be debated today because any amendment of legislation came under the jurisdiction of the government.

Furthermore, any move towards its acceptance required several steps, and all of these could not be carried out at today's sitting, he said at a press conference, also attended by Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Adenan Satem, at the Sarawak State Legislative Assembly building here.

Ahmad Zahid said that if the motion was approved, the next step would be for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak to have a discussion with all parties, not just Barisan Nasional component parties.

"Then, a select committee must be established comprising representatives of all political parties, Muslim and non-Muslim MPs," he said.

Ahmad Zahid said all quarters must understand that the Syariah Courts (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act 1965 already existed and had been amended in 1984 to expand the powers of the Syariah courts, but this had nothing to do with the Islamic penal law, hudud, and did not take over the powers of civil law or the judiciary.

Asked why BN MPs were expressing support for a Bill to be brought by the opposition, Ahmad Zahid said that was not an issue as the Dewan Rakyat allowed MPs to table Private Member's Bills. "To support or not is not an issue; it (then) depends on the select committee we are going to incorporate. We are going to engage all the component parties; don't jump the gun. We haven't discussed the select committee yet, no such thing as support or voting yet because the matter is not to be debated or voted on yet," he said.

"It is not hudud. There will be no debate or voting yet. We will form a select committee first, engage everybody. Don't jump the gun, don't confuse your readers, your audience. Furthermore, this bill is only about Muslims," he said.

Meanwhile, Adenan said that since there would be no debate or voting at today's sitting of the Dewan

Rakyat, all Sarawak MPs would not take any decision on the matter as yet.

"We are happy that the matter will be brought before a committee, comprising representatives of all parties, that will study it in depth. Only then will we be required to come to a final decision," he said.

Adenan said Sarawak totally rejected hudud. However, as explained by the Deputy Prime Minister, the Bill has nothing to do with hudud.

"A decision on the amendments will only be considered after the select committee studies the matter," he added.

Ahmad Zahid then went to Astana Negeri to receive the Darjah Datuk Patinggi Bintang Kenyalang award, which carries the title "Datuk Patinggi", from Sarawak Yang Dipertua Negeri Tun Abdul Taib Mahmud. -- BERNAMA

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