

End to child conversion

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- Mohamed Nazri



BENAWAPIC

KUALA LUMPUR: The cabinet has made a landmark decision to resolve once and for all the issue of forced conversions involving children which have torn apart families.

It decided that a child must follow the religion practised by the parents at the time of marriage in the event one of them opts to convert.

Also, a marriage solemnised under civil law can be dissolved under only the civil law.

In announcing the decisions at a press conference yesterday, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz said: "Conversion must not be used as a ground to automatically

dissolve a marriage or to get custody of children."

He said any individual who wanted to convert to another religion must resolve all problems regarding his responsibilities before converting, to avoid innocent parties, especially children, becoming victims.

These were among the long-term solutions discussed by the cabinet on Wednesday in the wake of the case of Mohd Ridzuan Abdullah and his wife, M. Indira Gandhi, and several other similar cases before that.

Mohd Ridzuan, 40, or K. Patmanathan, 40, a Muslim convert who used to be a Hindu, was reported to have converted his children - Tevi Darsiny, 12, Karan Dinesh, 11, and

Prasana Diksa, one - to Islam on April 12 and applied for custody at the Syariah Court although their mother is still a Hindu.

The baby is with Mohd Ridzuan, while the two older children are with his estranged wife, a kindergarten teacher.

The Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism is helping Indira Gandhi solve the problem and said on Wednesday that it would write to the Malay Rulers for "justice and fair play" in this case.

The cabinet had tasked five ministers to study the case and brief the cabinet on Wednesday.

Said Mohamed Nazri: "Do not use religion, for instance Islam, as a tool to run away from responsibility or to escape from a marriage, as this will bring a bad name to the religion."

He said the cabinet also agreed that the relevant date of application of the Islamic law to any Islam converts was the person's conversion date.

To give effect to the decision, the Attorney-General's Chambers will be asked to look into all relevant laws that need to be amended, excluding the syariah law which are under the power of the rulers.

Readership ... A St Ronan kindergarten pupil engrossed in reading a book during a "Let's Read Together" programme as part of International Book and Copyright Day at the National Library in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. Various activities aimed at promoting reading were held, culminating in a mass reading session during which participants, guests and the public read for five minutes.