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Anwar: Umno in no rush to enter Sarawak

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KUCHING, Tues. - Acting Umno president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said Umno would not be hasty in spreading about wings to Sarawak but will allow discussions to continue with the State's legitimate Bumiputera leaders.

"This is Umno's stand," he said at a dinner held in his honour at the Kuching Hilton last night.

"Why did it take me so long to clarify this issue? It was to provide some entertainment," he said.

"Politicians," he said, "cannot survive without this entertainment ... the murmurings, (poison-pen) letters, rumours ... the excitement."

"Dr Mahathir and I are observing this drama and sandiwara (theatrics) from afar but if the situation becomes rough, we will intervene."

Several of Sarawak's Barisan Nasional leaders reacted cautiously to the possibility of Umno spreading its wings to Sarawak. (See accompanying story)

Chief Minister and Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu president Tan Sri Taib Abdul Taib Mahmud had earlier claimed that groups harping on the issue of Umno's entry into Sarawak were motivated by "less than noble" reasons.

Taib claimed these groups wanted Umno to spread its wings to Sarawak because they were jealous of the stability of the Sarawak Barisan Nasional.

The acting Prime Minister Seri Anwar Ibrahim nevertheless said the question of Umno entering Sarawak would be discussed by the top Umno leadership and the legitimate State Bumiputera leaders.

Referring to what he described as questions and rumours on Umno's impending move into Sarawak, Anwar said he was making this clarification because the party did not want attention diverted from efforts to develop the State.

"We cannot deny talks about Umno's participation and presence in Sarawak," he said, "but our top national leaders will talk over the matter with the legitimate Bumiputera leaders of Sarawak. Let the matter rest there."

Anwar further elaborated: "All I know is that (Umno president Datuk Seri) Dr Mahathir (Mohamad) will discuss with Tan Sri Taib and seek his views on the matter. There has been no decision ... no problems at all."

On the DAP, he dismissed the party's style of politics as "cultivating a culture of fear and insecurity."

"The DAP's irresponsible tactic of using innuendoes and stirring racist sentiments," he conceded, "appeals to the masses."

"But this appeal is temporary," he said. "It cannot be sustained because this mass appeal is not based on justice, only on conflict and negative racial sentiments."

Instead of concentrating on the weaknesses, Anwar called for emphasis on virtue and goodness.

On dissatisfaction expressed by the various races with their lot, he said the Malays, Chinese and Indians had their respective grievances, acknowledging that many complaints were legitimate.

"Members of a race without complaints," he said, "are dummies. But it does not mean that the Government totally rejects all grievances, only that we act based on the principles of justice, with emphasis on economic growth."

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