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Anwar calls on Umno members to close ranks (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim today asked Umno members to help reinforce the country's resilience, adding that the time for everyone to close ranks could not be more pressing and crucial than now.

The Umno deputy president and Deputy Prime Minister also outlined several concerns that must be addressed if efforts towards this end were to yield the desired results.

Speaking at the joint opening of the Umno Youth and Wanita assemblies at the party headquarters here today, Anwar said: "We are being tested. It is obvious that the need to consolidate and close ranks cannot be more pressing than now.

"Therefore, let us not allow ourselves to be carried away by feelings of contentment and comfort. Herein lies the role of Umno Youth and the Wanita wing.

"You must always be at the forefront of the party's struggles, especially in helping to ward off attacks, be they internal or external. For this, you must be truly united.

"I am sure that if we are united, we can overcome whatever challenges that come our way, consistent with the party's struggle and that of the nation."

Anwar also urged party members to continue supporting Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as party president and Prime Minister and not fall into the trap set by those who have tried to split the leadership.

Traditionally, the deputy president delivers the keynote address at the joint opening of the two wings. The two wings will then hold their assemblies separately before the party's annual assembly which starts tomorrow.

Anwar's speech set the tone for delegates of the two wings. He began his speech by focusing on his first concern - the challenges to the economy. He then talked about the new direction for the Muslim community, corruption and slander; and concluded his address by expanding on the challenges brought about by globalisation.

He said the increasing interdependence of Malaysia's economy with the rest of the world should make the country always wary of the tide of international economics.

Drawing the delegates' attention to the present decline in share prices on the local bourse, Anwar, who is also Finance Minister, said this was not the result of the poor performance of companies whose shares were listed on the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange.

What started as an attack on the Thai currency has now escalated into an attack on the economies of all Asean countries and Hong Kong, he said, adding that what the country was now going through was an economic war on the stock exchange and the money market initiated by a Western syndicate.

He said the Government had already started discussions with its counterparts in Asean and in the region to work out an appropriate strategy to collectively counter the problem.

Anwar said: "We know that the rakyat, especially the entrepreneurs and the business community, are going through an uneasy and difficult period. The Government understands their predicament and hopes that they remain strong and calm amidst this testing period.

"Look at all that is happening as a struggle for national resilience which is no less significant than the struggle for independence."

Anwar's address on the new direction for the Muslim community focused on the need to devise a strategy and approach that was pragmatic and attuned to the times.

In this regard, the Umno deputy president said: "Therefore, it is very important for Muslim intellectuals - both lay and religious - to harness the people's minds and nurture a deep understanding of Islam and contemporary issues so that they can help design the appropriate approaches.

"Our strategies must be moderate and pragmatic, which does not mean that we need to compromise fundamental principles just so that we can go with the flow."

He said Muslims in this country must be realistic. He added that the Government did not view efforts to improve the country's economic and social status as secular. Instead, such efforts were also an Islamic obligation, he said.

On corruption and slander, Anwar said: "The dignity and honour of our society depends on more than money. We will leave behind a crippled society if we do not imbue it with integrity of character.

"If we were to nurture abiding values, society will be spared the fanatical, power-crazed, and greedy individuals who have crept into our midst to incite hatred with their lies and slander. These acts of treachery are, of course, against the teachings of Islam.

"It seems that we have not learned from the events that led to the fall of the Malacca Sultanate. This unwillingness to learn from history is dangerous. It lulls us into complacency."

As for challenges in the era of globalisation, Anwar said: "The Malaysian people as a whole have placed their trust in Umno. In this era of globalisation, we have to attend not only to internal issues but beyond that in order to ensure for ourselves a respectable position among the community of nations."

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