

21/11/1997

Anwar reiterates our right to choose leaders

Ramlan Said; Chok Suat Ling

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim today reiterated that Malaysians had the right to choose their own leaders as the country is "not a colony of any superpower".

Who the people chose as leader was "our right, and not the right of others, not of Americans or its Congressmen".

"We are not reacting to the statement (by 34 United States Congressmen) but we want to give a clear, unequivocal message from this nation to the international community and US Congressmen that we are an independent country," he said when opening the 13th Convocation Fiesta at the International Islamic University.

The Congressmen have moved a draft resolution in the US Congress calling on Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to apologise for his alleged anti-Jewish remarks, failing which he should resign as Prime Minister.

Dr Mahathir had, on several occasions, clarified that he did not say a Jewish conspiracy was behind the attacks on Southeast Asian currencies.

Anwar declared, to the applause of the university's staff and students, that "we decide who is supposed to lead Malaysia".

The 10-day fiesta at the university campus in Gombak featured sports, exhibitions and stalls selling a variety of goods. It was held in conjunction with the university's convocation ceremony on Monday.

The fiesta aims to foster and strengthen the relationship among the university community, its neighbouring community and the public.

Anwar also launched the university's Cyberlounge, set up to encourage the use of computers among undergraduates, and the IIUM Students' Representative Council homepage.

Also present were National Unity and Social Development Minister Datin Paduka Zaleha Ismail, IIUM rector Datuk Dr Abdulhamid Ahmad Abusulayman and the fiesta organising committee director-general Saiful Adli Mohd Arshad.

Anwar said Dr Mahathir had been endorsed by the people in a number of democratically held elections.

"Sometimes we lose seats, sometimes we lose even States ... but the vast majority of the people have endorsed his leadership. There is utterly no reason why we should be dictated by the Americans.

"I am not suggesting that the American Government or administration or the American people share the views of these 34 Congressmen, but we certainly have to make a stand ... we are not a colony of any superpower."

Anwar also took the opportunity to say the Government was not anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic.

"Nowhere in Islam are we asked to be anti-Jew. We, however, condemn the Israeli aggression against the Arabs.

"We deplore and abhor any injustices or oppressive actions perpetrated against innocent people."

He said there must be a clear distinction between the atrocities of Israel and innocent Jews "who can be anywhere in any part of the world, even in Malaysia".

"If they are citizens, they are citizens, if they are tourists they are tourists ... there is no discriminatory action or prejudices against them."

He said this had always been the Government's stand, adding that people, including students, should not be misled, used or confused by elements

which sought to tell them otherwise.

On the current economic problems, Anwar said the Barisan Nasional was still intact and strong, and thus was able "to lead and manage the economy, able to speak up to the Americans, or Israel, or any country for that matter".

He also reiterated the Government's call for a review in international economic practices, which currently allowed for a group of speculators and manipulators, whom he called "currency gunslingers", to "create havoc and rape the country at the expense of the ordinary people".

"I don't care if the ringgit falls or not, but I do care when the ringgit falls, it affects the welfare of my people ... and that is the problem we are facing now.

"And who benefits? A bunch of speculators because they act without any rules.

"The rich and the powerful from the industrial world benefit from this exercise and, therefore, they are not keen...they are not in the mood to change these rules."

Anwar also urged local and foreign students studying here to learn to co-exist, and to accept and understand one another.

He said he had heard comments from Malaysian students on their foreign counterparts. "They say some foreign students are too rough."

"My advice to them is accept and try to adjust," he said, adding that students who come to Malaysia also have to try and adjust to the circumstances.

"The strength of Islam is the ability to adjust very fast. There must be some measure of tolerance and understanding of the complexities of each society."

(END)