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Umno-Anwar (Support)

ANWAR REITERATES HIS SUPPORT FOR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, June 21 (Bernama) -- Umno deputy president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim today reiterated his full support for the leadership of party president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He also said that there was no truth in allegations that their views differ in terms of the handling of the nation's economic crisis.

Anwar, the Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister, said that all decisions in whatever discussions including on economic issues were made jointly.

"If there is a difference in opinion, there is still one leader...one captain, that is Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and I fully support his stand," he said when winding up the debate on the last day of the Umno general assembly here.

Anwar said that Umno should continue to be united and send a clear signal to all that the party is solidly united behind Dr Mahathir.

The foreign media often highlighted the difference in the handling of the nation's economic crisis by Dr Mahathir and Anwar.

"We have to accept that they may be differing views but we could discuss, make decisions, and resolve...we have one leader and we execute them with faith in Allah," he said.

Anwar however said this did not mean that he was not free to express his opinion.

He said this was in line with the principles of democracy. In jest, he said: "If we insist on only a certain way, then we will have to set up a military party and (Defence Minister) Syed Hamid (Albar) can be the leader."

Anwar also took the opportunity to clarify the misconception over statements said to be contradicting, made by him and Dr Mahathir in several occasions like at the World Bank and International Monetary Fund meetings in Hong Kong in September last year.

"Sometimes my statements are interpreted in different ways...I have to say that I have never, in my speeches, wish to dispute the integrity of the party leadership," he said.

Anwar said that what was important now was for Umno and the government to concentrate on the unity and culture of the party and to revive the nation's economy.

He also related his experience when asked by foreign correspondents why he has not challenged Dr Mahathir's leadership because they claimed he has strong internal support which could ensure him victory.

Anwar said: "I replied that firstly for me, Dr Mahathir is my leader. I had openly pledged my support and loyalty to him.

"Secondly, I told them that we need a solid and united team and Umno will not allow any attempts to adversely affect our unity."

He said that he was also asked whether he was in total agreement with Dr Mahathir and the reply he gave was: "Of course not. I accepted him as a leader and he does not expect me to agree with him 100 per cent."

Jokingly, Anwar said: "He rides horses, I ride the jet ski, he loves the mountains, I love the ocean waves."

Anwar said that Malaysia should remain an independent and sovereign nation, free to determine its own policies.

"The country may be small, a little poor but has pride and leaders who are prepared to defend the nation's dignity. What good are fantastic

leaders, an affluent nation but are made fools of by others," he said.

On the Malay agenda, Anwar said that the government would continue to stress on the development of the Malays despite the economic slowdown, by creating, among others, a social network.

"We have stated that the social, educational, health, rural development, agricultural and poverty eradication programmes should be maintained," he said.

Asked to comment on a book which has disparaged him, Anwar replied in a pantun, the gist of which is that his loyalty remained unchanged but there were people out to create suspicion and they may get hurt in the process.

-- BERNAMA

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