

16/09/1998

Anwar's removal `does not affect our liberal policy'

MALAYSIA's liberal economic policy is not about to change just because former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is no longer in the Government, said International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz.

"I hate to disappoint you, but all of us are advocates of liberal policies," she replied to a question from the audience at a trade investment seminar in New York on Monday with regard to Malaysia's commitment to a liberal economic policy following the sacking of Anwar.

Rafidah added that liberalisation had always been the Government's policy, and it was not Anwar who had been its chief promoter.

He had been perceived by many in the foreign business community to be the most investor-friendly face in the Malaysian Government and the strongest champion of liberal trade.

She said all members of the Cabinet worked as a team, and that Anwar, like her, worked collectively towards whatever policy the Government might have. Rafidah said the Government's policy of liberalising according to the country's ability and situation remained.

Rafidah said she was quite perplexed at how foreigners could arrive at the conclusion that the Government's policies were dependent on Anwar.

"If one member of the team dies or get sacked it does not cause a ripple as far as government policies are concerned."

She told the audience that Anwar's removal was at the discretion of the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and that it was done purely because of evidence in relation to allegations of personal improprieties.

Rafidah said there was compelling evidence to warrant Anwar's removal from the Government and Umno.

"What are the reasons? They've got nothing to do with politics, nothing to do with economic policies and nothing to do with differences of opinion."

She said, for example, she did not often agree with the Prime Minister, and neither did he with her. But they worked to convince the other to look into their point of view.

Rafidah said the perception foreigners had of Anwar was perhaps due to his saying what they wanted to hear, and they in return complimented him for doing so.

"But I have been long enough in the business and old enough to know at what level I accept these praises," she said, adding that when praised - like everyone else - she felt good too.

But she said she would worry when the praises went sky high - "... my goose pimples start to rise into big bumps" - and would try not to let them go to her head.

After the seminar Rafidah received a letter of support for the Prime Minister - in his handling of the Anwar affair - from the Malaysia Association of America, a New York-based organisation of Malaysians working in the country.

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