

## **Anwar admits 'weaknesses' in govt communication**

**Malaysiakini**

**03 September 2023**

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Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has acknowledged there is room for improvement in the government's communication efforts in the lead-up to the 2023 state polls.

This acknowledgement followed a dialogue event attended by Anwar at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia in Skudai, Johor, today - where a student voiced criticisms over the government's public relations skills.

The Form 6 student, who only identified himself as Syed Ali, said the weak communication - especially on social media - led to the government's work being drowned out by criticisms and "slander".

"I am sure that weak communication machinery by the government is among the reasons for the decline in the coalition government's performance in the last state elections," he said.

He added that the "ineffectiveness" of certain ministries and government agencies highlighted the urgency of reforming the government's information

dissemination and the need for a stronger media unit.

Anwar took the criticisms on the chin.

“Yes, it’s true. There have been weaknesses in our (the government’s) communications. I’ll admit that,” he said in response to Syed Ali.

He said he faced accusations from his political opponents, ranging from being accused of betraying Islam and being labelled a “tool for DAP”, to receiving criticism for using government vehicles for official government duties.

Most recently, he said, he was criticised for attending a concert, with critics labelling it a majlis maksiat (sinful event).

### **Explain what’s right, defend what’s true**

However, the prime minister said the responsibility for countering such criticism and attacks does not rest solely on the government.

“You (youths) have to answer. Was that (concert) a majlis maksiat or not? Can a prime minister attend a cultural event?

“In Malaysia, during National Day for example, where there are dances by Chinese, Tamils, Dayak, Kadazans, whose costumes at times are not in line with Islamic rules, is that ok?

“If you think it is not, you can support them (critics), but if you think it is acceptable, then you Syed Ali, must call on your friends, explain what is right, and defend what is true,” Anwar said.

Later on in the forum, the prime minister called on the youths to act to save the country, and not get caught up in older folks’ constant need to bicker.

The government has constantly been under fire by critics who alleged the government has not made tangible achievements during its time in power.

Meanwhile, the government has also found itself facing backlash due to poor communication.

The most recent incident involved plans to introduce a module teaching hadith in school, which caused an uproar among non-Muslim groups due to a lack of clarity that the lessons would only be taught to Muslim students.

The government has also been under fire for perceived censorship against critics.

Several media websites were blocked by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) on the grounds of slander or inaccurate statements.

In August, electoral watchdog Bersih pointed out that the government's approach to handling criticism mirrors the censorship tactics employed during former prime minister Najib Abdul Razak's administration, which involved website blocking and the use of legal measures to silence his opponents.

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Source: <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/677887>