

PM: There is public consensus on LGBT but harassment not condoned

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Malaysia's recent bans on LGBT content do not mean doors are open for the harassment of the community, said Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim.

He also said the government must respect the consensus of the people, whom he mentioned were not open to public displays of LGBT content.

"But do we then go and harass them? That's a different subject. I don't approve of any attempt to harass," Anwar said.

The prime minister said this in an interview with journalist Christiane Amanpour, on a segment aired on the international news outlet CNN today.

Amanpour asked Anwar about Malaysia's stance on the matter following the government's ban on Swatch's Pride collection watches.

The Tambun MP said the government has not charged anyone so far under the ban - which states that selling, distributing, or owning banned material could result in three years in jail, a fine of up to RM20,000, or both.

Asked if he would like to see the enforcement be changed, the prime minister replied in the affirmative.

“Of course. The consensus of the people, I have got to respect but that should not be seen as harassment,” he said.

In late May, the Home Ministry raided Swatch stores to seize watches from its Pride collection due to LGBT connotations.

The ban on the items was made in early August - two days before the six state elections - in which the government had hoped to make gains in Kedah, Kelantan, and Terengganu, and win over conservative voters.

As such, Anwar denied Amanpour’s suggestion that it was a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy on LGBT that Malaysians accepted, but rather that tolerance should be exercised.

“The issue against the LGBT is the harassment, that I think we have to avoid,” he stressed.

Tough times

Amanpour then raised the prime minister’s own sodomy charges, of which, he

spent nearly a decade in jail and was later acquitted.

“I have made it quite clear that we need to review and look at the law. It should not be abused. It should not be an attempt in the case that I went to...be used for political persecution.

“But finally, we have to respect the general sentiment of Malaysians,” he said.

Speaking about his experience in jail, Anwar recalled the abuse and assault he experienced the night he was arrested.

“It was tough, not only for me but for my wife, family and colleagues.

“What I have learned is important; the meaning of freedom of democracy, and a need for compassion in a country that must respect the rule of law.

“I’m, in a sense, more a democrat who believes in values and human rights than before I was arrested and charged and imprisoned,” Anwar said.

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