

Of Malays and spoon-feeding: Experts want action from PM, not rhetoric

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Education activists have called for more action instead of rhetoric following a speech attributed to Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim in which he said that “Malays cannot continue to be spoon-fed”.

In a speech read by Deputy Prime Minister Fadillah Yusof at the celebration of Universiti Teknologi Mara’s (UiTM) 25th anniversary yesterday, Anwar said it was important that UiTM help the Malay community progress.

He was also quoted as saying that the Malay community cannot continue to be spoon-fed to the extent that they become overly dependent on others.

He added that UiTM’s role is to bring educational progress to the Malays and bumiputera until they can stand on their own and contribute to the economy.

Zaharom Nain, a professor of media and communication studies, said Anwar needs to move beyond mere words if he is serious about affecting change.

“This 'Malays cannot continue to be spoon-fed' refrain is like a broken record. Don't just say it. You need to slowly but surely remove that spoon.

“We should be moving beyond race and ethnicity in thinking about communities that need help,” he told Malaysiakini.

He said removing that spoon also means removing the arrogance of those opposed to the recent call for UiTM to temporarily open its cardiology training unit to non-bumiputera personnel.

“Anwar should have spoken out decisively then,” said Zaharom.

In the speech yesterday, Anwar wrote that the history of UiTM must be understood within the context of the challenges and issues surrounding the education of the Malays.

He cited the community's backwardness and poverty as a reason that UiTM remains relevant today, saying, “We cannot escape the reality that Malays and Indigenous people need enhanced educational support because many come from disadvantaged backgrounds.”

Article 153

Politician and academic Abdul Aziz Bari agreed with Anwar that the “spoon-feeding” for the majority race was not meant to be for an indefinite period.

The DAP’s Tebing Tinggi assembly person said this also goes back to Article 153 of the Federal Constitution, which states that “It shall be the responsibility of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong to safeguard the special position of the Malays and natives of any of the states of Sabah and Sarawak and the legitimate interests of other communities in accordance with the provisions of this Article.”

“Essentially, the provision is not the problem,” said Aziz.

“It’s the interpretation and implementation especially the New Economic Policy and its excesses due to Umno’s interpretation of the provision.

“Today, the problem is with PAS and other right-wing politicians who do not want to budge from this position.”

He claimed that Anwar was consistent in advocating a new agenda, which was a new interpretation of Article 153.

This extended to the PKR president’s call for affirmative action policies to extend from race-based to need-based, he added.

Aziz and Zaharom also pointed out that it was no coincidence that Anwar's speech came on a day when UiTM board of directors chairperson Raduan Che Rose was charged in the Shah Alam sessions court with seven criminal breach of trust charges involving RM271,000 over alleged misuse of research funds.

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