

PM on defensive after communication fumble on 'private funding' for flights

Malaysiakini

25 November 2024

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim is in defence mode after his remarks in Parliament raised questions about private businesses allegedly paying for his travel expenses on official trips.

Taking to Facebook today, Anwar clarified that his portion of travel expenses were all covered by the government.

"I did not use funds from private companies.

"The government used a Malaysia Airlines flight to visit four countries at a cost of RM1.6 million.

"This used government funds completely," he said.

He added that the balance of seats in the flights were offered to private companies who were going to the same countries as he was to seek investments or partnerships.

These private companies paid RM4.5 million for their share of the flight costs.

Anwar said that by splitting the cost for a chartered flight instead of using the government's executive jet, Putrajaya had saved RM900,000.

"I repeat, the government did not use private funds. There is no conflict of interest.

"Don't be trapped by slander from the crazy era (zaman edan)," he added.

Anwar was responding to a Sinar Harian article last Friday quoting C4 Center as saying that using private funds in the premier's flights may lead to such companies asking for something in return.

Government spokesperson Fahmi Fadzil made the same clarification as Anwar last Friday, but it appeared not to have caught as widespread attention.

Earlier this morning, the CSO Platform for Reform also issued a statement which expressed concerns about private-sector funding undermining the government's integrity.

PM's original statement in Dewan

The backlash appears to stem from Anwar's original remarks on the matter in the Dewan Rakyat last Thursday.

Anwar, in response to queries about the costs of his overseas trips, said that the government had engaged with private companies headed to the same destination as a means of cutting down on travel expenses.

"They joined the delegation. They paid for the fare and costs.

"Meaning, if I am not mistaken, around 70 to 80 percent of the flight costs were covered by these private companies that had business and investment interests in the country, because the government helps these companies whether they are importing or exporting," he said.

However, Parliament's Hansard showed that Anwar did not explain that the private companies only paid for their share of travel expenses, and not the government's.

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