

Anwar: I never offered to join Cabinet

I'll only take over PM post when the time is right, PKR president says

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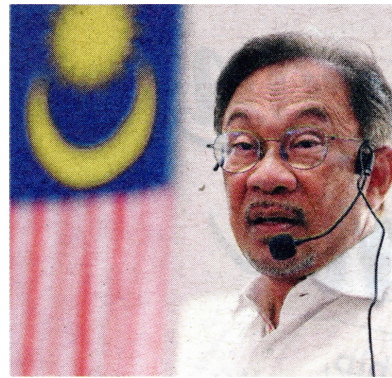
KUALA LUMPUR: While Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim (*pic*) says he has never offered himself to be a member of the Cabinet, his wife and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail says a vacancy may happen only when the Prime Minister steps down.

Their comments came following a statement by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad that there was no vacancy in the Cabinet for now and no intention to increase the number of ministers.

He said this when the media asked him if the time was right to bring in Anwar to join his Cabinet team, after he chaired a Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia meeting in Putrajaya on Thursday night.

Dr Mahathir had given assurance many times that he would hand over the reins to Anwar as promised, but had not set a date for it.

He recently brushed off speculation of a Cabinet reshuffle, though he acknowledged a possible change in portfolios.



Anwar, who is PKR president and Port Dickson MP, said yesterday that he had never offered himself to be a member of the Cabinet and would take over the premiership when the time was right.

"Thank you, I've never offered myself to be a member of the Cabinet... the signed consensus within Pakatan Harapan was that Mahathir would be the Prime Minister and Dr Wan Azizah his deputy until it is my turn to become the Prime Minister," said Anwar after chairing a meeting of the parliamentary cau-

cus on reforms and governance in Parliament yesterday.

Meanwhile, Dr Wan Azizah said the vacancy in the Cabinet might happen only when Dr Mahathir steps down as Prime Minister.

"There is no vacancy, so I guess there will only be one when the Prime Minister vacates the seat as promised," she told reporters during a visit to CyberSecurity Malaysia, where she toured the digital forensic laboratory.

Earlier, Anwar said Pakatan needed a policy shift to address the issue of poverty as the country moved towards the 12th Malaysia Plan.

"We don't want the (12th) Malaysia Plan to make only minor changes.

"Pakatan is a government of reforms. We must come up with economic policies that will be more effective than the ones before," he said in reaction to recent findings of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights Prof Philip Alston that Malaysia's poverty rate could be between 16% and 20% instead of the official 0.4%.

Anwar also said a special seminar to discuss Malaysia's poverty line was being planned for early October in Parliament.

"We take note that the Prime Minister himself has taken a positive approach in being ready to review the research by Prof Alston, who is an expert in this field.

"This is a discourse that we must spread in our country as the issue of poverty cuts across all races.

"It doesn't matter what the percentage is. What's important is that the number is too big and we must take an effective economic approach to help the people," said Anwar.

He added that issues on poverty in Malaysia were also previously highlighted by local experts such as economist Prof Dr Jomo Kwame Sundaram and Prof Mohd Nazari Ismail from Universiti Malaya, as well as bodies like Khazanah Research Institute.

Following Prof Alston's announcement, Economic Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Azmin Ah said recently that Malaysia stood by its official poverty figure of 0.4% as it was derived from internationally accepted standards.