

'IT'S ABOUT REACHING OUT TO PEOPLE'

Six-state programme is not a waste of public funds, says prime minister

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THE Malaysia Madani Aidilfitri Open house, which will be held in six states starting today in Kedah, is not a waste of public funds, but an effort to reach out to the people.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim also dismissed the "penunggang agama" (riding on religion) accusation levelled against the federal government under his leadership over the hosting of the event.

"Anywhere (in the country and the world), the respective governments will host the (open house) event for their people.

"The event is neither being held for my personal interest or the interest of (my) family, but it is all about reaching out to and feeding the people.

"And the cost incurred is lower since it is being held in Alor Star (Kedah) compared with Putrajaya," Anwar told reporters after performing Friday prayers at Masjid Jamiul Ehsan in Kampung Kubu Gajah, Paya Jaras, here yesterday.

He was asked to comment on Pasir Gudang member of parliament Hassan Abdul Karim's call for the prime minister to use allocations from his own coffers or those of PKR or Pakatan Harapan

to fund the Malaysia Madani Aidilfitri open house programme.

Hassan, who is a PKR lawmaker, had also urged Anwar to confirm that government funds would not be used for the open house programme.

Apart from Kedah, the Malaysia Madani Aidilfitri open house will also be held in Penang on May 6, Negri Sembilan on May 7, Kelantan on May 12, Terengganu on May 13 and Selangor on May 14.

The event has generated criticism, especially from opposition leaders.

Anwar said Hassan was merely expressing his personal view and that the matter would be taken into consideration.

He, however, declined to comment on the *penunggang agama* accusation by Perikatan Nasional (PN) chief whip Datuk Seri Takiyuddin Hassan.

"In the spirit of Aidilfitri and the month of Syawal, I do want to respond to his statements.

"During this blessed month, we should avoid issuing statements which will trigger 'syak wasangka' (suspicion) or 'buruk sangka' (prejudice in nature) against others.

"The event is held once a year for the people. What is important is we should adopt prudent spending when organising such an event," he said.

On a related matter, Anwar also confirmed that Kedah Menteri



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim greeting the public after performing Friday prayers at Masjid Jamiul Ehsan in Kampung Kubu Gajah, Paya Jaras, Sungai Buloh, yesterday. PIC BY ASWADI ALIAS

Datuk Seri Muhammad Sanusi Md Nor would be attending the Malaysia Madani Aidilfitri Open House event in the state.

Anwar said Sanusi would accompany Sultan of Kedah Al Aminul Karim Sultan Sallehuddin Sultan Badlishah to the event.

On an unrelated matter, the prime minister dismissed claims that he refused to entertain concerns raised on the controversial Penang South Island (PSI) project, which has elicited mixed re-

actions among non-governmental organisations and fishermen.

The federal government, said Anwar, was ready to listen to the concerns raised by stakeholders over the development of the project.

"The project, in principle, has received Environmental Impact Assessment approval, which came with 71 conditions that needed to be fulfilled.

"I, myself, have raised concerns over the development of the pro-

ject. I am aware of the concerns. If there are objections to the development of the project, we are ready to hear them.

"Having said that, the Penang government should also be given the opportunity to address the issues raised over the development of the project."

Anwar was asked to comment on the PSI project, which sits in a Malay-majority area eyed by PN to win in the upcoming state elections.