

PM: M40 GROUP NOT NEGLECTED BY GOVT

Anwar emphasises need to strike a balance between meritocracy and equality, points to disconnect between elites and grassroots

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has reiterated that the government's initiatives do not focus on the low-income group (B40) only, and refuted allegations that the middle-income group (M40) are being neglected.

He said there have been many initiatives that have been implemented to cater to both groups.

"The assumption that the government only comes out with approaches with the B40 as the sole focus is not true."

Anwar said the establishment of public boarding schools, such as the science schools, Mara Junior Science Colleges (MRSM) and the Malay College Kuala Kangsar (MCKK), had brought benefits to many children from the M40 group.

"Not even up to two per cent of the low-income group have benefited from boarding school facilities, and that is why I suggested to the Education Ministry recently to set up a special school or allocation of one or two per cent for poor students, or else the cycle will continue to persist," he said when launching the iTekad micro-credit programme at Bank Negara Malaysia here yesterday.

On meritocracy, Anwar also said it was important, but could not be the sole element in making policies for the nation.

"The system (meritocracy) is important, but it cannot be the only criterion to ensure fair governance and administration of the country.

"One side talks about meritocracy and the other side talks only about the (Bumiputera) quota... I think both must be combined, so there must also be meritocracy; otherwise, we will not elevate the best among us," he said.

He said justice was not always



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim visiting a food stall after launching the iTekad micro-credit programme at Bank Negara Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. PIC BY ASYRAF HAMZAH

about fairness when referring to the practice of meritocracy without equality among people from different backgrounds.

"The elites are obsessed with meritocracy mainly because they have all the privileges, such as coming from the best schools and coming from wealthy families.

"While the disadvantaged group does not necessarily have all the means to go further or even know any good schools, especially those from rural areas, meritocracy will not serve them well," he said.

Anwar said there needed to be a balance between meritocracy and equality, and pointed out that there was a disconnect between the upper elites and grassroots.

"If we want to discuss meritocracy between the best schools in Kuala Lumpur and schools in Kapit, Sarawak, that means proposing a formula that does not emphasise fairness."

Anwar said he always reminded the ministers and bank leaders to always try to understand the struggles of the people, especially those from the B40 group, to avoid any misunderstanding that could lead to skewed perceptions on other aspects.

"Sometimes I worry, too. We

have been independent for so long and matured over time, but sometimes our discourse is divided and there is a separation between the top and bottom.

"They (the people) might turn to ethnic and religious issues due to feeling neglected by the top brass if they (ministers and bank leaders) persist in failing to hear them out," he said.

The prime minister said he had also requested industry leaders, including those in banking, to approach students to share their respective experiences.

"I see these young people being more interested in meeting industry figures and leaders because this is more relatable to them compared with hearing speeches from the prime minister and ministers," he said.

On another matter, Anwar said he was optimistic about the interests of foreign investors in the country's economy, especially after it recorded high foreign investment inflow recently.

"Our recent performance is very positive compared with before, and that will help us catapult our economy further. Nonetheless, the development of our economy needs to be robust and it has to be diverted away from old practices," he said.