

PM: We must find middle ground

'Balance needed between meritocracy and affirmative action to ensure fairness'



Sharing his views: Anwar speaking at the launch of the iTekad micro-credit programme in Kuala Lumpur. - FAIHAN GHANI/The Star

KUALA LUMPUR: There must be a balance between policies on meritocracy and affirmative action to ensure fairness, says Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

The Prime Minister said there is currently a disconnect over the issue, where “the elite are obsessed with meritocracy” at the expense of those requiring government assistance through affirmative action.

“Meritocracy is important but it cannot be the sole criterion in the administration of the nation, which must be based on fairness.

“It is important among the elite and the rich, but if you want to talk about the best schools in Kuala Lumpur and compare them to schools in Kapit, Sarawak, it means that it is a formula that does not stress fairness.

“That is why we have to strike a balance between the two,” he said when launching the iTekad

micro-credit programme, a collaboration between four banks, at Bank Negara Malaysia yesterday.

Last month, Anwar said the quota system at public universities in the country will be retained but students from all races who excel in their studies will get places in institutes of higher learning.

He had said the quota system will continue to be implemented to enable Malay and bumiputra students to maintain the racial balance in these universities.

Yesterday, he cited a dialogue that he held with university students on Aug 5 in Kedah that showed there was still a “disconnect” over the issue of meritocracy and affirmative action.

“In my recent dialogue with young undergraduates, one side talked about meritocracy and the other side talked only about the

quota or affirmative action.

“I think that both can be merged,” he said.

He said meritocracy is crucial to “uplift the very best among us” but at the same time, affirmative action will ensure fairness for the less fortunate.

“I worry that even such a long time after Merdeka, there is still a disconnect on this issue among the elite and less fortunate,” he said.

He warned that if this disconnect is left unchecked, racial and religious issues will persist among the people.

“It is because they (the less fortunate) feel sidelined and neglected, they resort to racial and narrow religious issues to save themselves,” he added.

Anwar said he believes that this discord over meritocracy and affirmative action will remain a problem if steps are not taken to address it.