

CRITICISM OF PM'S SAUDI VISIT IS 'MERE POLITICKING'

Anwar's visit a success, especially for economy, says communications dept chief

KUALA LUMPUR

THE Community Communications Department has dismissed criticism of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's visit to Saudi Arabia as mere politicking.

Its director-general, Datuk Dr Mohammad Agus Yusoff, said although Anwar did not get to meet his Saudi counterpart, who is also the kingdom's crown prince, the prime minister's trip was a success in other areas, particularly in terms of the economy.

Among Anwar's successes, he said, were the meetings with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and the Muslim World League in Makkah.

He had also witnessed the signing of three memoranda of understanding between several Malaysian and Middle Eastern companies.

Agus said during the three-day visit, Anwar had attended briefings by Malaysian entrepreneurs on their involvement in Saudi Arabian mega-project and dis-

cussed issues affecting the Muslim world.

"Is Anwar's visit and what he did in those three days considered unsuccessful?"

"If they aren't, I don't know what the measure of success is in the eyes of the opposition."

"Was (his trip) unsuccessful just because he could not meet King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud and the crown prince, or do they have a more substantive argument?"

He was responding to criticisms by an opposition member of parliament, who had said Anwar should inform the Dewan Rakyat on the outcome of his visit, especially after not meeting his counterpart there.

Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia's Machang MP Wan Ahmad Fayhsal Wan Ahmad Kamal on Saturday said an explanation was needed as Anwar did not meet the crown prince, even though a meeting had been scheduled.

Wan Fayhsal, who is Perikatan Nasional foreign affairs committee chairman, also compared Anwar's visits with that of former prime ministers Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said unlike these previous leaders, there had been no reports of Anwar being invited to enter the Kaabah, a customary honour given by Saudi Arabia to visiting heads of state and top leaders.

Agus said Muhyiddin made his



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim with representatives of Middle Eastern companies in Jeddah last week. Anwar witnessed the signing of three memoranda of understanding between Malaysian and Middle Eastern companies, pic courtesy of pmo

official visit to Saudi Arabia only a year after being prime minister, whereas Anwar arranged for his visit only four months after taking office.

He said Muhyiddin's wish to meet King Salman face to face in March 2021 also failed and they met only virtually.

"However, due to political differences, Anwar's visit is being painted as wasting the country's money and a trip for leisure."

"Anwar had explained this. In fact, the Saudi leadership had requested that his visit be extended for two more days to meet the country's leaders, as the king and the crown prince had changed their schedules ahead of Ramadan."

"However, he had to decline and promised to return as he had to attend a breaking-of-fast event

with Yang di-Pertuan Agong Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah on March 25.

"He also had a day trip to Cambodia on March 27 and a visit to China on March 29 to meet its top two leaders, Xi Jinping and Li Qiang."

"Isn't his schedule packed? Wouldn't it cause major changes if his return (from Saudi Arabia) was delayed by another two days?"

"Understand the time constraints that our prime minister is facing."

Agus responded to criticisms that Anwar had left out the minister in the Prime Minister's Department in charge of Religious Affairs during this visit, saying it was a trip related to current affairs and trade, and not on Islamic issues.

He dismissed claims by the opposition that King Salman and the crown prince "did not like" Anwar, and said the duo were among the first foreign leaders to congratulate Anwar on his appointment last year.

"So what is the problem with Anwar's visit to Saudi Arabia despite not being able to meet their leaders? The problem is the opposition wants to humiliate Anwar and only wants to only play politics."

"Opposition members who are unhappy with the outcome and cost of Anwar's visit can ask the prime minister himself in Parliament. He is ready to answer them every Tuesday."

"Ensure your attendance. Only then will the people know what the issue that they are making such a fuss about."