

# 'We'll help develop Labuan'

## PM: Revival on the cards but no bridge project for now

By MUGUNTAN VANAR,  
STEPHANIE LEE  
and DURIE RAINER FONG  
newsdesk@thestar.com.my

**KOTA KINABALU:** The Federal Government will work with Sabah to develop Labuan although the proposed bridge linking the mainland to the island is not an immediate priority, says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

He said the bridge project, like other mega projects, had been put on hold.

"I have avoided big projects like MRT, the new Kulim airport, and I have been attacked for that. I'm a realist and we spend what we are able to," he said after addressing over 8,000 federal and state civil servants here yesterday.

On the possibility of private financing initiative (PFI) to build the Labuan bridge, he replied that the government had to bail out such projects in the past.

"It comes back to the government because government guarantee is required. Many so-called private initiatives had to be bailed out," he added.

Recently, there have been calls for the Labuan bridge to be built as well as calls that Labuan, which was made a federal territory in 1983, be returned to Sabah.

The Prime Minister said that returning Labuan to Sabah was not an issue as the international offshore financial centre (IOFC) must be developed.



**Nice to meet you:** Anwar shaking the hands of congregants as he stops to perform prayers at Masjid Negeri, Kota Kinabalu. - Bernama

He added that the main issue was the sluggish development in Labuan and it was for the Federal Government to work with Sabah in reviving it.

Earlier in his speech to the civil servants, Anwar called for a clean and efficient government to bring the state and nation forward.

On another matter, Anwar told reporters that he would leave it to the Sabah government to decide when he was asked whether the Sabah government was his idea of a unity government.

"Our position is that we invite everyone. But based on the peculiar experience of Sabah, I leave it to the

wisdom of the state to discuss and decide," he added.

In his speech, Anwar said he had given Chief Minister Datuk Seri Hajiji Noor his full support to lead Sabah. He urged the people to allow Hajiji, who was on the brink of losing his government over a month ago, the space to administer the state.

"Give a chance to the Chief Minister to lead and uphold the dignity of Sabah," he said in his speech during the event at the Sabah International Convention Centre.

Anwar also believed that Hajiji had handled the political crisis in Sabah well.

The crisis was triggered when Sabah Barisan Nasional-Umno severed ties with the Gabungan Rakyat Sabah (GRS) government on Jan 6.

"It turns out that despite his gentle demeanour, his sepak terajang (kicks) and silat politik (political moves) were nonetheless terrific," he said of Hajiji, to loud applause from the floor.

"In a short space of time, he (Hajiji) has managed to solidify the state government's position and it has become more stable now.

"And I think (the question of) any political tension doesn't arise any more."

During the political crisis, Anwar went to Sabah to meet Sabah Barisan chief Datuk Seri Bung Moktar Radin, Parti Warisan president Datuk Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal and Parti KDM president Datuk Peter Anthony.

The three parties had worked together to unseat Hajiji's GRS government.

It was understood that Anwar proposed that Hajiji consider an all-party unity government involving GRS, Pakatan Harapan with Barisan, Warisan and KDM.

The proposal was aimed at ending the Sabah political crisis that was triggered when Barisan pulled out of the GRS-Barisan coalition government.

However, Hajiji eventually left out Sabah Barisan and Warisan as well as KDM in the state Cabinet reshuffle, much to these parties' anger.