

# PM: JOURNALISTS FREE TO CRITICISE GOVT

However, he says, news reports should not be racially provocative or disturb public order

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**J**OURNALISTS should feel free to report news even if it involves criticising the prime minister and the leadership.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said it was not necessary for the media to only praise and report good things about the government, as was done in past administrations.

He said criticism of the government was welcome as long as the news reports did not carry any form of racial provocation or attempts to disturb public order.

"My friends and I, under the leadership of the government, made a very clear decision that the media in Malaysia should be free.

"But apart from that, criticism of the prime minister or the leadership should be required. It should not cause anxiety and fear among reporters," he said at the National Journalists Day (Hawana) celebration here yesterday.

Present were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, Communications and Digital Minister Fahmi Fadzil, his deputy Teo Neo Ching and Perak Menteri Besar Datuk



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim visiting an exhibition at the National Journalists Day celebration in Ipoh yesterday, PIC BY L. MANIMARAN

Seri Saarani Mohamad.

Anwar also wanted media practitioners to create awareness to cultivate a new culture in the journalism industry.

He said journalists in the past also played a role as initiators of ideas in addition to acting as agents of change.

"We cover briefly the historical coverage of Perak journalists, but we already know that journalists in our country are also carriers of ideas, initiators of the spirit of independence, and sowers of the seeds of moderation and refinement.

"This includes Za'ba, who brought reform or change. But also other national figures such as Kajai, A. Samad Said and Usman Awang, who are key players in making the new centre a success.

"So Hawana should be used to express our (government's) appreciation to them (media prac-

titioners)."

Fahmi later said the ministry was committed to realising the establishment of the Malaysian Media Council (MMC).

He said the government supported initiatives to enhance media freedom.

Fahmi said the MMC, which is in the final stages of planning, would also play a role in helping media practitioners deal with the challenges they faced.

He said the ministry had informed the prime minister that the draft bill for the MMC was being finalised.

"This proposal will be forwarded to the Attorney-General's Chambers for scrutiny before it is presented at the cabinet meeting. Once approved by the cabinet, it will be presented in Parliament. It might be tabled in October or at the latest in the first session of next year."