

PM: MALAYS, ISLAM NOT UNDER THREAT

80pc of rural development schemes benefit Bumiputeras, says Anwar

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CLAIMS that the status of Malays and Islam in the country is being challenged are baseless political rhetoric played up by certain quarters, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim yesterday.

He said 80 per cent of the activities by the Rural and Regional Development Ministry had benefited Malays and Bumiputeras, including those in Sabah and Sarawak.

"This year, the programmes by the unity government are way better. The allocations set aside by the Finance Ministry for (opposition-held) states such as Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu are higher than previous years.

"But what is being spread and slandered is that these states are sidelined. Islam is being challenged, but by whom? What programmes have we conducted that have tainted Islam?"

"I asked the ministry if Karnival Usahawan Desa breached Islam? But this is the endless political narrative.

"That is why I stress that we must answer firmly, we must not be derailed and boost efforts to develop everyone, regardless of race and religion, and ensure the wellbeing and justice of all in the country." He said this at the five-day carnival held at Anjung Floria yesterday.

Anwar said he represented Malaysians when he spoke to United States President Joe Biden on the crisis in Gaza.

He said at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) Economic Leaders' Meeting in San Francisco, he told Biden millions of Malaysians were distraught by Israeli atrocities against Palestinians.

"People asked me where did I get the courage and strength to speak about it in front of Biden,



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim inspecting the booths at Karnival Usahawan Desa in Putrajaya yesterday. PIC BY SAIFULLIZAN TAMADI

which is a rare occurrence.

"I answered it was because I understood the pulse of Malaysians, who want their leaders to carry their voice and I spoke the truth. That was what I did for you in front of the president of the US."

Anwar said he told Biden that Palestinians were being killed and deprived of their land, belongings and dignity because of the Zionist regime.

He said a ceasefire was not enough but stressed that immediate medical and food aid must be sent to Gaza.

"Alhamdulillah, the assistance from Malaysia was prioritised by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi. When I met him in Riyadh, he promised to fulfil our pledge (of sending aid).

"Many parties wanted to help but Malaysia was prioritised and we were one of the countries with the shortest waiting period to channel assistance to Gaza," Anwar said, adding that this cooperation was due to good diplomatic ties.

He said another example of Malaysia's good standing was Malaysians enjoying 15 days of visa-free travel to China from Dec 1.

"Apart from three European countries, Malaysia was given this privilege. This would not have happened without the efforts of the Foreign Ministry."

Anwar said the government would consider increasing the allocation for the Madani Community Programme to RM2 billion in the next budget.

He said the RM1 billion for the programme announced in the 2024 Budget might not be

enough to develop rural economic activities.

The programme, supervised by the Implementation Coordination Unit, sees villages, longhouses and people's housing projects given grants of between RM50,000 and RM100,000 to conduct projects, such as vegetable gardening or crafts.

"The aim is to have the community decide on what economic projects they want and then manage them without the involvement of ministerial officers.

"The communities can get the ministry's help if they want to, and I want them to be assisted and monitored to ensure the projects take off.

"I also want to ensure there is no theft. If it happens, I will ask the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission to investigate.

"So, spend wisely, and if it is successful, it will be Malaysia's first programme where the millions of community members take charge of their activities, and it can continue for years to come."

Anwar, who is finance minister, said the programme would uplift the income of communities.

It involves agriculture and food, herbs and health, tourism and recycling.

He said the government would not change its stand on subsidies even if there were potential price increases of items such as chicken.

He said those in need would be given financial aid, like Sumbangan Tunai Rahmah.

"2024 is the time for us to conduct a few programmes that had been delayed for decades, including targeted subsidies."