

'Pas welcome to join unity govt, but a line has to be drawn'

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has extended the olive branch to Pas, and is ready to consider making the Islamist party a partner in the unity government.

In a recent interview with American-based news magazine *Time*, the PKR president and Pakatan Harapan chairman revealed that the government had sent an invitation to Pas.

However, Anwar said a line would have to be drawn to protect the rights of all citizens in the country.

"Yes, I have been open to the idea from the beginning. After all, this is a unity government and we do what is best for our country.

"But of course, we are going to draw a line.

"Islam is the religion of the federation, but this is a multi-religious country and I want every single citizen in this country, of all religious persuasions, to know that they have a place in this

country," he said.

Anwar, however, said there had neither been a clear rejection nor a positive response from Pas.

He also did not discount the possibility of Pas accepting the offer to join the unity government.

"The political climate is still a bit heated, so we'll let it cool off for some time. I don't want to preclude that. Of course, contingent upon these major policy conditions being accepted."

He also acknowledged that there was a need to combat Malay-Islamist supremacist rhetoric, and said this would be done through a three-pronged strategy, including through economic development.

He said a more just, equitable system would ensure that no community or part of the country was seen to be ignored or marginalised.

"Second, of course, is education because extremism, racism and religious bigotry breed easily

among the ignorant segment of the population.

"When I say ignorant, I don't mean you're not qualified, you don't go to university.

"I mean the lack of understanding of the total message of a religion dependent on some of the *mullah* and *sheik*, with their very narrow, obscure interpretation."

His third strategy was to make radicals understand that Malaysia, despite being predominantly Muslim, was still a multi-racial country.

"And we have survived hundreds of years with the presence of Buddhists, Hindus and Christians. There is no reason why you should upset this and cause enmity," he added.

When asked what he expected to achieve from his *Reformasi* ideals, the Tambun member of parliament said matters relating to governance would be at the top of his list.

"I mean, in this country, the plundering has caused a mess

and corruption is systemic. And if you stop that, it is a major success story.

"Not a single tender in the past nine months has been awarded through a negotiated process.

"There is (now) a proper tender, a transparent system. This is a major departure from the corrupt practices of the past."

He also said Parliament had formed numerous select committees to deal with graft, and that these committees could summon and question any minister or civil servant.

"In the judiciary, there is not one case of appointments or decisions that I've interfered in," added Anwar.