

Focus on governance first says PM

PUTRAJAYA: The country's top priority must be focused on improving good governance before any new types of taxation are considered, says the Prime Minister.

Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said under Malaysia Madani, the main aim was to ensure good governance was always upheld.

"The focus is not taxation. I have always held the view that taxation should be secondary to any reasonable public and economic policy initiative.

"And we must begin with the issue of governance so we can ensure there are no unnecessary leakages, absconding of public wealth, or corruption.

"You can correct the excesses first, then you can relate whether there is a necessity to tax further," he said at the Symposium on the Path Towards Greater Prosperity for Malaysia here yesterday.

Anwar, who is also the Finance Minister, said discussions about the Value-Added Tax (VAT) and the Goods and Services Tax (GST) were important, but it must be remembered that the country has inherited a major problem of gov-

ernance, endemic corruption, and figures of deficit that it has to grapple with.

"It was not because the economy has lost its capacity to grow or the fundamentals are weak, but the way we govern and tolerate this," he added.

Anwar said policies to be implemented to address leakages included targeted subsidies, with the government deciding to stop subsidising the rich.

"I am not anti-the ultra-rich, and there is no reason for me to be anti-business. But at the moment, we are subsidising the rich, so we have decided to stop this," he said.

He also touched on the need for clarity of policies, namely the New Industrial Master Plan (NIMP) 2030, the National Energy Transition Roadmap (NETR), and the Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the 12th Malaysia Plan (RM12), and for political stability to ensure the government could embark on radical policies and reform the economy.

Speaking to reporters later, Anwar took to task Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Hamzah

Zainudin for accusing the government of forcibly getting the support of a Perikatan Nasional MP.

Saying he viewed the allegations seriously, he added: "If he has any shred of evidence, he should prove his serious accusation. Do not simply shoot your mouth off. He should lodge a report so an investigation can be carried out by the authorities."

Anwar was responding to the support expressed for him by Kuala Kangsar MP Datuk Iskandar Dzulkarnain Abdul Khalid.

Thanking the Opposition MP for his backing, Anwar clarified that he had never met Iskandar Dzulkarnain to seek the latter's support.

"What I know is that I did not meet or contact him, nor did I send any representative to see him. And I certainly do not know who purportedly threatened him. But if he wants to remain in Perikatan, it is totally up to him," the PM added.

On Tuesday, Iskandar Dzulkarnain revealed that the reason he declared support for Anwar was so that funds would be channelled to his constituents,

not because he was pressured to do so, brushing off allegations that he was threatened with corruption charges.

Hamzah, who is the Perikatan secretary-general, claimed that Iskandar Dzulkarnain was brought to meet a top officer of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission on Oct 1 and was threatened with corruption charges if he refused to sign a statement declaring support for the government.

On a separate matter, Anwar said any decision to fill the existing vacancy in the Cabinet could only be made when a suitable replacement is available.

He had previously said that there was no urgency for him to conduct a Cabinet reshuffle.

The post of Domestic Trade and Cost of Living Minister became vacant following the death of Datuk Seri Salahuddin Ayub in July.