

'REFORM AGENDA HAS NOT BEEN ABANDONED'

Party members freely criticising me proves this, says Anwar

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said the fact that his party members were free to openly question the government's policies and actions showed that his administration has not abandoned its reform agenda.

His remarks came in response to a question by CNN chief international anchor Christiane Amanpour on recent criticism levelled by PKR member and Pasir Gudang member of parliament Hassan Abdul Karim, who accused Anwar of abandoning his reform principles.

"Look at it positively, a member of my party expressing criticism against me, it's a very democratic process.

"Now his criticism on the issue... what do you expect me to do? Do I instruct the attorney-general to change his decision?"

The interview with Amanpour in New York was broadcast on CNN on Saturday.

Amanpour also asked him about the arrest of Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Muhammad Sanusi Md Nor, who was later charged with issuing seditious remarks against the sultan of Selangor.

Anwar said it wasn't about cracking down on opposition fig-

ures but the need to protect the royal institution.

He noted that he, as prime minister, had been the subject of frequent abuse, yet none of his critics were charged with sedition.

"I have been abused on a daily basis, and none have been charged (with sedition).

"You see, (if there are) criticisms against the prime minister of the government, I don't charge them (with sedition).

"But if you touch on the rulers, the sultans, that's different."

Anwar said there is a need to protect the royal institution and that he could not be criticised for such prosecution.

"I think there is a need to protect the institution. That's what the people have decided since independence. That's the system we inherited. So, when a person is deemed to be abusive towards the rulers, and the charges are preferred by the attorney-general, the law persists until we are able to amend it.

"If the issue of criticism is against the prime minister and he takes action, then (the argument of cracking down on the opposition) is valid," Anwar said.

Asked about the government's stand on LGBTQ+ following the seizure of Swatch watches in Malaysia for allegedly promoting the lifestyle, Anwar said it should not be constituted as harassment against the group. He said as prime minister, he must respect the consensus of Malaysians and that they did not accept public displays of LGBTQ+.

However, he said, while there was a need to exercise some degree of tolerance, harassment had to be avoided.

Anwar was also asked about the threat that competition between the United States and China poses to Malaysia and the Indo-Pacific region.

He replied that the challenge is for Malaysia to maintain neutrality.

"We have been asserting the point that they cannot insist that we take sides.

"China is an important neighbour, an important trading nation, and close to us. The United States has been a traditionally long-time friend who has been responsible from the beginning with investing and assisting us in developing the country.

"So, how do we navigate these difficult circumstances? Our appeal is to leave us in a democratic, peaceful atmosphere, focus on the centrality of Asean, and maintain excellent relations."

On the newly issued China Standard Map that caused an uproar for showing China's territory extending in Malaysian waters, Anwar said Malaysia would continue to discuss the issue.

"When I met (Chinese Premier) Li Qiang, I talked about these issues, and I am happy because they responded very well and it was clear and categorical.

"Yes, we do have these claims, but we will never do anything to exercise actions that would explode or cause dissension with our colleagues and our friends in the region as we will continue to negotiate."

Page 1 pic: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim delivering his speech at the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York on Friday.