

PM: We are open to criticism

Students can set up a Speakers' Corner, but avoid the 3Rs, says Anwar

By NELSON BENJAMIN
nelson@thestar.com.my

JOHOR BARU: The government has no problem accepting criticism from anyone, including students, as long as it is not to insult or put people down, says the Prime Minister.

Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said he had no objections should students want to set up a Speakers' Corner.

"I have no problem with students criticising vice-chancellors, ministers or even me. I can accept criticism - as long as it's not to insult or hit out at other races or religion," he said, adding he had conveyed this to all vice-chancel-

lors of universities in the country.

Anwar said he would also continue with his engagements with students and youths as this would allow him to learn more about their problems.

Speaking during a dialogue session with students and educators at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia here yesterday, Anwar also stressed on the importance for students to be critical and creative in their thinking.

"Universities should be a place to train students to think as humans and not create 'sacred cows' who do not think (and) are not creative or critical," he said, adding that for Malaysia to progress, racism, corruption, igno-

rance and religious bigotry needed to be stopped.

Malaysia, he said, had the capacity to serve all Malaysians and not just a particular race.

During the question and answer session, Anwar admitted that there was weakness in the government's ability to counter all the attacks levelled at him, especially on social media.

"Even my attendance at a concert has been made an issue, including the labelling of my actions as immoral.

"Similarly, (it was also made an issue) when we announced our country's boundaries with Indonesia," he said, urging the young generation to work with

him to change the country's narrative because of their love for the nation.

The government, said Anwar, would look into the needs of special needs students, especially those with hearing disabilities, who were forced to travel to Penang to take their SPM examination.

He said he was shocked that only one school in the country was conducting the examination for the whole country.

Anwar was responding to a member in the audience, who had highlighted the issue.

"As Prime Minister, I do not know everything," he admitted.

He also fielded questions on the

needs of Form 6 and university students, the problems faced by disabled students, Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) and poverty.

Anwar said he would need more time to fix all the issues raised as he did not want to increase the country's debt level, which presently stood at RM1.5 trillion.

"I cannot continue to borrow billions to get the next generation to pay for it," he said, adding that with a strong and stable government, more investments would come into the country which would then generate more income to be channelled to help the people.