



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim at the launch of the 2024 National Security Month in Putrajaya yesterday. With him are Defence Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin (left) and Home Minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail (second from left). PIC BY AIZUDDIN SAAD

'NOT RESTRICTING FREEDOMS'

'NEW CYBERSECURITY LAWS ARE NECESSARY'

It's a matter of national security, and also to curb crimes, says PM

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THE government's decision to implement strict cybersecurity laws is not a move to restrict freedoms, but a necessary step to address the negative aspects of the digital world.

This, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, included online scams and cyberbullying.

He said cybersecurity should be a priority as it had an impact on national security, and more measures were needed to curb crimes.

He emphasised the importance of beefing up cybersecurity, which he said was not discussed until recent years following the advancement of technology.

"This includes cooperation with friendly countries to enhance our capacity, as the people are the ones who will determine the country's peace and security," he said in his speech at the launch of the 2024 National

Security Month.

Anwar, who is finance minister, said the new measures were necessary to create a safer online environment.

He said the government had introduced the Cybersecurity Act, and more recently, the communications minister and the digital minister had focused on ensuring online safety for both domestic and international users.

"Yesterday (Monday) in Ipoh, I addressed the question of whether this might restrict freedom.

"This country is a democracy, and freedom must be given for people to voice their views, whether they agree, criticise or oppose."

He cited cyberbullying, which drove a woman to commit suicide recently, and online scams, which involved billions of ringgit in losses.

"When we say restrictions are necessary, some argue against limiting freedom. Is freedom for deception, stealing, or abusing people until they commit suicide justified?"

"These are issues that people need to understand, hence the focus on personal safety."

The move for stricter regulation of the digital world, including a new regulatory framework, which requires social media and online messaging platforms with more than eight million users in

Malaysia to be licensed have received pushback from several quarters.

These include parties like Gerakan and MCA, as well as former Malaysian Bar president and Bersih co-chairman Datuk Ambiga Sreenivasan.

Gerakan president Datuk Dr Dominic Lau Hoe Chai said he agreed with the need for strengthened laws regarding cybersecurity.

However, he said, he was concerned that the laws would threaten the rights to freedom of speech, especially where it could be used by the government to curtail dissent.

His sentiments were echoed by MCA vice-president Datuk Seri Wee Jeck Seng.

Wee had voiced his own concerns that such a move could be a double-edged sword and be used by those with ill intentions.

He said the suppression of constructive online criticism could impede the country's progress.

The harshest critic, however, has been Ambiga, who was, in particular, against the new licensing regulations.

Taking to X, formerly Twitter, Ambiga said she never thought that a government led by Pakatan Harapan, which had once fought to abolish the Printing Presses and Publications Act, would not only keep it but enact new licensing laws.