

New laws protect people, says PM

Anwar: They are needed as Malaysia's preparedness against cyberattacks is 'very weak'

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PUTRAJAYA: Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim says the plan to introduce new laws for social media and Internet messaging services is to ensure a safe space for all Malaysians, not to curb freedom.

Insisting that fresh regulations must be in place despite criticism from several quarters, the Prime Minister acknowledged that Malaysia's preparedness against cyberattacks and bullying was "very weak" compared with other countries.

He pointed out that some countries placed cybersecurity as a top priority to portray the importance of cyberthreats and related issues.

"This goes to show that any threat to cybersecurity affects the security of the entire nation and all layers of society," he said when launching the National Security Month 2024 here yesterday.

Anwar cited several recent incidents related to cybercrimes that harmed the people, including cyberbullying incidents, scams and exploitation of minors for sex trade.

"Which is why we need to have better and more effective laws in place to protect people against such threats," he added.

Concerns were raised over plans to regulate social media platforms, and the Prime Minister said that as a democracy, Malaysia allowed freedom of speech and expression on "whether to agree or disagree".

"Some individuals abuse cyber and digital space to torture and torment others, leading to suicide, or they use it as a tool to exploit minors for sex trafficking.

"Many have also been cheated online through social media platforms, resulting in losses. According to the authorities, the amount has reached RM2.5bil.

"But when we say all this must



be stopped, some say we are curbing freedom. Is there freedom to cheat, freedom to steal, freedom to torture others until they commit suicide?

"That is why the rakyat must understand that in such matters, the safety, dignity and self-worth of people must take priority," Anwar said.

On July 27, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) announced that all social media and Internet

messaging services with at least eight million registered users in Malaysia must apply for a Class Licence beginning Aug 1. The enforcement of the regulatory requirement will take effect on Jan 1.

MCMC said this was in line with the Cabinet's decision that social media services and Internet messaging services must comply with Malaysian laws to combat the rise in cybercrime offences, including scams and online fraud, cyberbullying and sexual crimes against children.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Law and Institutional Reform) Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said announced that new legislation to improve digital safety will include provisions for a "kill switch".

This sparked a debate, with some quarters questioning the motive.

Among those expressing concern over the new regulatory

framework was the Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ), which claimed that it was an attempt to exert control over social media platforms, saying it had far-reaching implications for freedom of expression as guaranteed under the Federal Constitution.

The law will require social media and Internet messaging service providers to take responsibility for addressing online crimes, including fraud, cyberbullying, the distribution of child sexual abuse material, and various forms of harassment.

Azalina said that the initiative was expected to be tabled at the next Parliament meeting in October.