

# PM urges empathy and open dialogue between faiths

**TOKYO:** Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has called for heightened empathy and open dialogue between people of different faiths and backgrounds as he addressed the growing threats of obscurantism, bigotry and intolerance that threaten to divide societies and undermine peace.

In his commemorative speech honouring the late Prof Toshihiko Izutsu at Keio University, the Prime Minister said that coupled with other factors such as politics and ethnocentrism, lack of empathy gives rise, for example, to Islamophobia.

"As we pay tribute to Toshihiko Izutsu, let us also reflect on the urgent need for civilisational dialogues in our increasingly fragmented world.

"By promoting empathy, understanding and respect, we can counter the forces of division and build bridges across cultures, religions and nations," he said in his 40-minute speech in front of about 200 attendees.

Izutsu was a Japanese scholar specialising in Islamic studies and comparative religion. He was known as the first and best translator of the Quran into Japanese. He died in 1993 at the age of 78.

Anwar said central to Izutsu's approach was his doctrine of empathy in the study of religions, and this empathetic lens was particularly relevant in multicultural



**Build bridges:**  
Anwar giving a speech entitled "A Feast of Civilisations: The Life and Mind of Toshihiko Izutsu" at Keio University in Tokyo.  
- Bernama

societies like Malaysia, where diverse religious and cultural communities coexist.

"I believe in Japan, while there is greater empathy in the approach towards the study of Buddhism and Christianity, as demonstrated by the level and frequency of dialogues, it would appear that it is somewhat lacking in the case of the approach towards Islam.

"Which is why I commend this university and express my profound appreciation for inviting me to give this oration.

"In my humble view, if we are to stay true to the precepts and noble examples of Izutsu, there should be greater dialogue as well

between Muslims on the one hand and Buddhists and Christians on the other," he said, Bernama reported.

Anwar further explained that it was incumbent on Muslims to be empathetic towards other religions so as to promote and preserve societal harmony, but pointed out that empathy has to be reciprocal.

"Just as it is crucial for Muslims to understand and have compassion for other religions, likewise, it is imperative that Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and others have that same empathy for Islam," he said.

Highlighting Malaysia's recent efforts, Anwar said the country

hosted the inaugural international conference of religious leaders earlier this month, where religious and intellectual figures from around the world participated to forge greater religious understanding and cross-cultural dialogues.

"In a world where populism and right wing ethnic or religious extremism prevail, calls for empathy may not be the easiest approach, particularly for politicians who want to get re-elected.

"We are seeing this across the world, particularly in Europe and the United States, which is why the imperative for cross-cultural dialogue is more pressing than ever," he said.