

Don't let prejudice run unchecked

Free media must avoid inciting racial and religious tensions, says Anwar



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KUCHING: The Federal Government will uphold media freedom with limits to protect national harmony, says Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

The Prime Minister said democracy required free media, which entailed the space and freedom to express ideas, views and information.

At the same time, he said, this should not be expressed freely without regard to ethical and humanitarian principles.

"If you allow racism to flourish or religious bigotry to have a free hold in this country, then you must anticipate racial strife and religious disharmony.

"I don't mind if we are downgraded by RSF (Reporters Without Borders) because we come down hard against racists and religious bigots.

"Protecting religious minorities and harmony is more important



Setting the stage: Anwar officiating Hawana in Kuching, Sarawak. Also present were (from left) Bernama chairman and SMG advisor Datuk Seri Wong Chun Wai, Sarawak Premier Tan Sri Abang Johari Tun Openg, Fahmi, Deputy Minister in the Sarawak Premier's Department (Corporate Affairs, Information and Sarawak Public Communication Unit) Datuk Abdullah Saidol. - Bernama

than getting high marks on an international index," Anwar said at the National Journalists Day (Hawana) celebration's highlight event here yesterday.

It was reported earlier this month that Malaysia had dropped 34 places to 107th in the World Press Freedom Index released by

RSF this year.

Anwar said a code of ethics was important to ensure that media freedom was not abused.

"I want to be a prime minister who upholds the principle of free media, but we also have to draw the line.

"While you are permitted to crit-

icise the government, you cannot incite racial and religious hatred or hatred against royalty.

"There must be limits. You cannot use freedom to divide and plant seeds of hatred that will destroy the nation," he said.

Meanwhile, Anwar announced an allocation of RM1mil for

Tabung Kasih@Hawana, which provides financial assistance to current and former journalists in need.

He said the government would continue the allocation this year after giving the same amount last year.

Anwar also allocated RM1mil to the Bernama Centre of Excellence for training programmes, especially in digital technology.

Earlier, Communications Minister Fahmi Fadzil said media practitioners will get to enjoy another one-month rebate on their mobile phone bills this year.

He said the Rahmah rebate incentive for media practitioners would be implemented for the second year in August to appreciate the sacrifices of the media.

Fahmi also said media organisations could contact mobile network operators for a special media corporate rate starting July 1.

In addition, he announced that his ministry, through national news organisation Bernama, would make Social Security Organisation (Socso) contributions for stringers for one year starting July 1.

"This means the first year of contributions will be fully borne by the ministry through Bernama," he said.

Fahmi said Information Department data showed that there were 565 registered stringers or part-time media personnel in the country.

Of this total, he said 538 did not have Socso contributions.