

'NO EXCUSE'

'CORRUPT PEOPLE WILL NOT BE LET OFF THE HOOK'

Past contributions do not justify stealing from nation, says PM

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ACTION will be taken against anyone who has plundered the nation's wealth, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said yesterday.

He said he could not accept the excuse that some people should be let off the hook for corruption because of their contributions to the nation.

"Everyone has contributed – village chiefs have contributed, community leaders and imam have contributed, but why should their contributions justify stealing from the mosque?"

"It cannot be that way," he said at the 100 Years of Za'aba Seminar in Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Tanjong Malim, Perak.

"Why should finance ministers think that just because they have contributed (to the nation) they can steal billions of ringgit?" he said, without naming anyone.

Anwar advised those who had stolen billions from the country to return their ill-gotten gains if they still considered themselves "warriors".

Anwar has said corruption is the "main cancer" affecting the

country and the people.

In May, Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission Chief Commissioner Tan Sri Azam Baki said the country lost around RM55 billion a year due to corruption.

Meanwhile, Anwar told CNBC in an interview that the Madani government's commitment to combating endemic corruption had significantly restored confidence among domestic and foreign investors, leading to increased new investments.

He said his primary concern during his initial months in office had been to restore the nation's reputation, particularly following the 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) scandal.

"In the initial few months, it was all about that. How do you deal with issues?"

"What about governance? What about what they consider endemic corruption, based on the experience of 1MDB and the various other scandals?"

"For example, leaders in the past, once they became minister of finance or prime minister, became billionaires. In a matter of years, this has to stop," he told CNBC in an interview which was quoted by Bernama.

Anwar noted that both domestic and foreign investors had recognised the government's strong commitment to fight corruption, even as some critics had deemed it overzealous.

"Without that trust and confidence, people will not invest in a big way.

"Unless those people have some corrupt arrangements with

you, they will continue.

"But that has to stop. Fortunately, it has stopped, although we are still carrying on with this mission. The crusade against corruption must be in full force."

Anwar, who is also finance minister, emphasised the importance of attracting high-end investments, particularly in artificial intelligence and semiconductors.

He acknowledged that Malaysia had experienced a surge in data centre investments due to its affordable energy and water supply, but stressed the need to shift focus towards more sophisticated technology to enhance the country's economic status.

"Nvidia, for example, coming in with sophisticated programmes for artificial intelligence, will allow us to truly move beyond middle-income status."

Anwar also highlighted the necessity of closing the skills gap to attract high-value industries, with the government aiming to produce 60,000 engineers in the next five years.

"The universities, colleges, polytechnics, and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions must gear up and change by getting this formal education institutions to work with the private sector," he said, referencing companies like Infineon that trained engineers to meet their specific needs.

Anwar also hinted that Malaysia might need a more flexible approach, potentially hiring engineers from neighbouring countries to bridge the skills gap.