

PM: OPPOSITION CLAIM ON ISLAM IS FALSE

'There's never been any discussion on altering status of official religion'

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THE government has never discussed changing the status of Islam as the official religion of the country, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim yesterday.

He said recent accusations by the opposition were unfounded, factually fabricated and had the potential to incite hatred. "What kind of fantasy is this? There is nothing to it. (Perak Menteri Besar) Datuk Seri Saarani (Mohamad) is here in Ipoh and the chief secretary to the government is here as well.

"We have never discussed changing these principles, whether they relate to language, Islam, special rights of Malay Bumiputeras, or the position of rulers.

"At no time since I became prime minister almost two years ago have these issues been discussed or even raised.

"But an opposition leader recently, during a *ceramah*, claimed that the government intends to amend the constitutional principle of Islam as the religion of the federation."

Anwar said this at the launch of the National Language Month at the Ipoh Convention Centre here.

Present were Saarani, Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Shamsul Azri Abu Bakar and Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka director-general Dr Hazami Jahari. Anwar said these statements would only fuel hatred among the public.

"I took a firm stance and mentioned this to Saarani earlier. Criticise our economic policies, criticise the issues, criticise the prime minister for not being wise in some areas.

"But you cannot lie, slander and instill fear as if what we are doing has destroyed the language, ethnicity or religion of the country."

Anwar said Malaysia was a



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim speaking at the launch of the National Language Month in Ipoh yesterday. BERNAMA PIC

strong nation by becoming a semiconductor hub, attracting investments worth hundreds of billions of ringgit, and was respected by allies and adversaries because of its stability.

"Differences in opinion are normal. Political differences are normal. But this country is peaceful, with clear policies on progress, fostering new skills and development.

"So what should be acknowledged is that our politics are stable. When the general election comes, then contest. But right now, the political landscape is stable.

"Stability allows us to plan, collaborate and strategise for the economy, whether it's economic policies, energy transition or digital transformation."

Investors, he said, had observed this stability, giving them the confidence in the country.

Anwar urged the opposition to stop creating a culture of fear and anxiety, likening it to frightening children with ghost stories.

"This is also true for politicians. When they see stability in politics and a thriving economy, they are driven by jealousy and seek to create fear among the public."

On a separate issue, he reminded the nation's elite against being overly enamoured with the English language to the detriment of Bahasa Melayu.

He said there were situations where certain groups were too enthusiastic and obsessed with English, which sometimes came across as excessive.

"I am not suggesting that we reduce the emphasis on or un-

derestimate the importance of English.

"However, I do not support displaying phobia towards our own language while glorifying another, as if our lives, success and intelligence depend solely on mastering English.

"These individuals might have been raised in London, but I want to remind them that they live in Malaysia and are responsible not only to a small elite group, but must also represent the aspirations of all Malaysians."

Anwar, who is finance minister, also said that emphasising any language should not be a "zero-sum game" that sidelined Bahasa Melayu as the national language.

He said the use of other languages, such as Chinese and Tamil, in schools should not reduce the focus on Bahasa Melayu, which holds a special position in the constitution and the education policy.

Anwar added that similar attention should also be given in the private sector.

"It is true that I emphasise the need to master English in this challenging world, as well as Chinese, Tamil, Arabic and other languages.

"No advancing country would disregard the major languages of the world.

"However, this is not a zero-sum game.

"Emphasising the importance of English proficiency, which is necessary and vital in this country, should not sideline or reduce the importance of mastering Bahasa Melayu as the national language."