

PANEL TO STREAMLINE STATUTORY BODIES

Secretariat will address overlapping functions, help to cut costs, says PM

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THE government has established a secretariat to overcome administrative issues and those related to the country's expenses, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

He said the Secretariat for the Rationalisation Study of Federal Statutory Bodies would begin its duties immediately as part of the government's efforts to reform the civil service.

"I recently decided that the Finance Ministry, representing the entire government, will establish a bilateral committee to update the rationalisation of statutory bodies.

"There are too many statutory bodies and their functions overlap, complicating operations.

"This rationalisation aims to reduce spending due to excessive expenditure and waste," he said at the Finance Ministry's monthly assembly here yesterday.

Present were Finance Minister II Datuk Seri Amir Hamzah Azizan and Treasury secretary-general Datuk Johan Mahmood Merican.

Anwar said the reform measures also involved closely monitoring all appointments of chairmen and board members in statutory bodies, government-linked companies and government-linked investment companies to ensure proper financial governance.

He said this was because some individuals viewed the positions as rewards and displayed extravagance, despite the funds coming from the people and the nation.

"That's why this monitoring must be more thorough. When a new chairman is appointed, the first thing they do is decide on the car and renovate the office, even though the office is in good condition.

"For the finance minister's office, I said there is no need to renovate. Some of us forget that this is a trust given to us."

Anwar said another reform



Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim speaking at the Finance Ministry's monthly assembly in Putrajaya yesterday. **BERNAMA PIC**

measure was that no one should hold too many positions.

He said board members should receive training, including in financial management.

As such, he said, all agencies and statutory bodies will have a Finance Ministry representative to oversee financial management and governance.

He said any ministry representative found failing to report breaches of financial regulations would be barred from future appointments to that body.

"I want to remind you, if there's any confusion in the selection of agency members, they will be barred from holding any board position afterwards, ensuring accountability.

"If we don't enforce this, the same situation will continue."

Anwar added that all staff under the ministry and its agencies should not be intimidated while performing their duties.

He gave his assurance that he would defend those who performed their duties diligently.

"I assure you that the Customs Department and Inland Revenue Board (IRB) will carry out their duties professionally.

"If there are reasonable appeals, consider them through the usual processes, but don't be intimidated by any names without exception.

"As long as I hold this position, I am responsible for its execution, and I am not concerned with any pressure or threats. If anyone thinks they can threaten me, they've got the wrong person.

"I will stand firm, and you should perform your duties diligently."

Anwar said the IRB had received complaints and criticisms from the elite for doing its job.

"Just because in the past (some quarters) did not pay their taxes, it does not mean they don't have

to pay them now. If previously certain obligations could be concealed, it doesn't mean that culture should continue."

Anwar added that if the tax imposed were deemed excessive, there was an appeals process.

"However, just because they're used to paying minimal taxes, doesn't mean they can continue with that practice.

"This country cannot progress and prosper if we think about only taxing the poor. If the wealthy accumulate immense riches and collude with the elites to avoid paying taxes, that's a form of exploitation of the people."

The Congress of Unions of Employees in the Public and Civil Services said it hoped it or union representatives could be involved in the new secretariat.

Its president, Datuk Adnan Mat, said it hoped that matters involving staff in the rationalisation plan would be prioritised.

"Certainly, the establishment of this secretariat is crucial for rationalising services, but attention to the welfare of existing staff must also be prioritised.

"Views from staff, who can be represented by unions, need to be considered before any decisions are implemented in future."

He also urged all public servants to heed the prime minister's call to enhance the quality of service delivery to the people.

He expressed hope that all department heads would fully cooperate with Chief Secretary to the Government Datuk Seri Shamsul Azri Abu Bakar and Public Services director-general Datuk Seri Wan Ahmad Dahlan Abdul Aziz.

"This cooperation is crucial for planning the framework for public service reform to ensure the successful implementation of initiatives aimed at improving services to the people."