

'MERDEKA MORE THAN JUST BEING FREE'

For nation to have independent spirit, Leaders must prioritise people's aspirations, ambitions, says Anwar

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has highlighted the importance of "Merdeka", saying it

meant more than just being free from the shackles of colonialism.

"Many countries achieve independence but they do not necessarily have an independent spirit," he said in his National Day address.

"The leadership changes and colonial masters are replaced by local leaders. But there are times when the local leaders are reckless, arrogant, corrupt and greedy like the people they replaced."

Anwar said for a country to have an "independent spirit", it must produce leaders who have the aspirations and ambitions of

the people at heart. He said the Madani government respected the contributions of its past leaders but it also ac-

knowledged that in the past, some leaders had crossed the line in the name of maintaining power.

"This must not be allowed to continue. We want to put an end to this and create a new culture of responsible leadership, where leaders cannot plunder the nation's wealth or abuse their power."

Anwar said the government was prepared to strengthen laws to tackle racial hatred in the country.

"We want to... create a new culture of responsible leadership, where leaders cannot plunder the nation's wealth or abuse their power."

He said it was the government's responsibility to protect the nation from those who seek to incite hatred, hostility and violence between communities.

Anwar warned that the authorities would act against those seeking to cause disharmony among the people.

He said he did not care if international media or foreign nations disagreed with the government's stance.

"Our duty is to protect our beloved Malaysia. If it (laws) is insufficient, we will amend and



strengthen our laws, and act to ensure this country remains safe."

On another matter, Anwar said the negligence that led to Malaysia losing Batu Puteh was a betrayal to the nation.

Acknowledging the reality of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) decision, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said no country in the world would easily give up its territory.

Instead, he said, countries would go to war and sacrifice thousands of lives to defend even a small area.

"Yes, we accept the reality of the ICJ decision, losing Batu Puteh, a small island. But this negligence amounts to a betrayal of the country.

"That is why the Madani government agrees to establish a Royal Commission of Inquiry to determine what happened.

"Why should this great nation, our beloved Malaysia, allow such a betrayal to occur so easily without using legal means to defend our rights?"