

Bring concerns to the table

Meet and discuss halal certification issues first, says PM

By **SARBAN SINGH**
sarbans@thestar.com.my

SEREMBAN: Those with suggestions or concerns regarding halal certification are advised to raise these issues in a meeting for thorough discussion and review, says Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Responding to media inquiries regarding the statements issued by certain individuals related to halal certification, he said issues touching on religious and racial sensitivities should not be used to create controversy.

He was responding to a report that the Malaysian Islamic Development Department (Jakim) was considering making halal certification compulsory for restaurants and food establishments that do not serve pork or alcohol.

The Prime Minister said regulations should be established to alleviate any apprehension among Muslims patronising

certain establishments.

“However, if the individual feels that the rules are unnecessary for some specific areas, discuss it properly,” he told reporters after the reopening of the Seremban (Southbound) Rest and Recreation (R&R) area along the North South Expressway here yesterday.

Asked if it was proper for Seputeh MP Teresa Kok to oppose the proposal by Jakim, Anwar said that she was giving her personal opinion.

“If there are other proposals or concerns, let us discuss this.

“This is just an individual's perspective. If there are suggestions or concerns, bring them to the meeting, and we will examine them ... there is no need to stir controversy,” he said.

Anwar said comments made by Kok were unnecessary as they were not helpful.

“It does not help clarify or

resolve the situation. It can be discussed in a cordial manner,” he said.

Kok had voiced her opposition to the proposal requiring all eateries that do not serve pork or alcohol to obtain halal certificates.

This, she added, could be burdensome to small businesses and restricts consumer freedom.

Anwar said the country did not need to face such issues as it was doing well both economically and politically.

“We are politically stable, the global community appreciates us, the economy is improving.

“We must respect the sentiments of both Muslims and non-Muslims. The issue has been raised in a good way. Our country is enjoying stable politics and favourable global recognition - why risk undermining this?” he added.

On Tuesday, Minister in the

Prime Minister's Department (Religious Affairs), Datuk Dr Mohd Na'im Mokhtar was reported to have said that to enforce mandatory halal certification, several Acts and laws would need to be amended, with various agencies involved in ensuring compliance.

On Saturday, Communications Minister Fahmi Fadzil was reported to have said that he hoped a peaceful resolution can be achieved by all sides regarding the halal certification issue.

He said he met Mohd Na'im and asked him to meet the relevant quarters and discuss with them on how to resolve this in an amicable manner.