

Anwar urged to ensure fair treatment of all citizens

> Probe against DAP MP raises questions on govt commitment to executing reforms and uniting Malaysians, says politician

■ BY JOSHUA PURUSHOTMAN
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

PETALING JAYA: In an open letter to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Malaysian Advancement Party president Waytha Moorthy Ponnusamy reminded him that his government is the custodian of justice and equality.

"Your government has a crucial role in ensuring fair treatment for all citizens, irrespective of race and religion. They deserve to be heard and have their concerns considered as this is vital for our nation's unity and prosperity."

He was commenting on a police investigation against DAP MP Teresa Kok for urging the government to review a proposal to impose *halal* certification on eateries not serving pork and alcohol.

Calling the probe "unnecessary" he said the issue questions the government's seriousness in carrying out reforms and uniting Malaysians to take on global challenges instead of scoring points on petty issues.

Stressing that his letter was not intended to offend any particular religion, their personal beliefs or the position of Islam in Malaysia, he said it served to bring government attention to the feelings of the 40% non-Muslim population in the country.

"The unilateral declaration of a PKR Religious Affairs minister without consultation with government partners creates the perception of an attempt to seize the role of championing Muslim issues away from Umno, which is part of the unity government.

"Freedom of expression is guaranteed under the Federal Constitution and Malaysians are entitled to speak up when their rights are infringed upon. The government must ensure its policies promote the true spirit of unity."

Waytha Moorthy said the country just celebrated its 67th National Day with a "Malaysia Madani Jiwa Merdeka" theme, so



Kok speaking to media representatives after having her statement recorded at Bukit Aman yesterday. - BERNAMA/PIC

the government should champion peaceful coexistence, nation-building and economic and democratic reforms.

"I urge the government to take proactive measures to unite all Malaysians and instil hope for a harmonious future. That would be appreciated as true reform."

He said as a lawyer who has scrutinised a statement issued by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department for Religious Affairs Mohd Na'im Mokhtar, there are no laws requiring restaurant operators or food companies to obtain *halal* certification.

"At no point did the minister say his proposal was being considered for Muslim eateries only. This puts pressure on (non-Muslim) business operators to compel them to obtain *halal* certification.

"I do not think there has been any objection from non-Muslims in the country towards the *halal* requirements for restaurants serving food to Muslims. However, it is natural to feel uncomfortable and raise objections when Muslim *halal* conditions are imposed on

non-Muslim businesses."

He said Mohd Na'im's suggestion infringes upon the legitimate businesses and lives of non-Muslims, causing alarm and anxiety.

He also said the potential extension of the rule to other businesses not selling pork and alcohol is a serious concern that needs to be considered in the larger interest of nation-building, peaceful coexistence and developing trust and unity among Malaysians.

He pointed out the "strange situation" in Malaysian politics, in which the very people who raise legitimate issues are investigated by police.

"Anwar should please consider the importance of holding dialogues and discussions in Cabinet before announcing policies and regulations that could cause alarm and anxiety among Malaysians.

"This approach would not only ensure all perspectives are considered but also foster a sense of inclusivity and transparency in governance."