

NEW CABINET LINEUP

'WE WANT TO EFFECT CHANGE'

Move necessary to ensure a strong govt for the people, says Anwar

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said his new cabinet lineup was a reflection of the govern-

ment's bid to effect change and ensure continuity in leadership. He said the inclusion of young leaders was part of plans to give room to the younger generation to helm the government in the long term.

"If we look at the scenario, there are many young leaders who can be regarded as second- or third-generation party leaders.

"In the early days (of my administration), I could not do this (include more young leaders) as the priority then was to ensure the unity government's stability and strength."

He said effecting change was necessary to ensure a strong government for the people.

He cited the example of Datuk Seri Dr Zaliha Mustafa, who was dropped as the minister in the prime minister's department (federal territories) in the recent cabinet reshuffle.

"She has been with PKR since its early days, and her journey has not been easy. There were moments when she endured challenging phases, but she succeeded.

"I believe she understands that I have a responsibility to expand the leadership lineup. At the same time, she fulfilled the role entrusted to her before giving way to new faces," he said.

Anwar was speaking at a dinner with senior editors of local and



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim at a dinner with senior editors of local and international media, including Media Prima News and Current Affairs Division deputy group managing editor and 'New Straits Times' group editor Farrah Naz Karim, at his official residence in Putrajaya yesterday. NSTP PIC BY AIZUDDIN SAAD

international media at his official residence here yesterday.

Present were Media Prima News and Current Affairs Division deputy group managing editor and *New Straits Times* group editor Farrah Naz Karim, *Berita Harian* group editor Zulkifli Jaill and Media Prima Television Networks, News and Current Affairs group editor Azhari Muhidin.

The prime minister also defended the appointments of ministers such as Hannah Yeoh, who has taken over Zaliha's portfolio.

He said his selection of cabinet members was not based on skin colour.

Anwar said governance in the federal territories required teamwork, adding that while the mayor and senior officials might be Malay, their responsibility was to serve and protect the interests of all communities.

"It does not necessarily mean that having a Chinese minister would result in Malays being oppressed.

"Likewise, if a Malay minister is entrusted with the Federal Territories portfolio, it does not

mean that the minister would only safeguard Malay interests.

"The (current) mayor is Malay, and governance requires teamwork, with a responsibility to assisted serve all communities.

"I am fully aware that when we make such appointments, it may be perceived as Malays being sidelined and Chinese interests being fully accommodated. How are we supposed to govern the country in this way?"

He said from next year, the government would take firmer and more decisive steps in addressing issues deemed sensitive and controversial, including those related to enforcement, language and race.

He said firmness in investigations, prosecutions and reviews was essential to restore public confidence in institutions such as the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission, the Inland Revenue Board and others.

The government, he said, would take a firm and uncompromising stance on issues involving language, race and religion when they threaten national

harmony.

"On issues of race, language and the economy, we must respond more firmly. We cannot continue to play on racial or religious sentiments to the point that they hinder the country's progress.

"If we continue to use the race and colour card, we will never get anywhere.

"That is why it is time for us to be firm, including on the issue of language."

On the Unified Examination Certificate (UEC), Anwar said it was frequently politicised despite his longstanding and consistent position.

"For me, UEC is not the main issue. It is important to get all streams to understand, but still, you can see the debate is skewed. One group says Anwar opposed UEC.

"It is not simply a matter of accepting or rejecting it, but of viewing it in a broader context, our national history, the national education system and the need to strengthen the national language," he added.