



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim waving to congregants after performing prayers at As-Salam Mosque in Puchong Perdana yesterday. NSTP PIC BY ASYRAF HAMZAH

NOT GOVT STANCE

# PM REJECTS RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO SPLIT

**Existing channels are sufficient to represent all ethnicities, religions, says Anwar**

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**P**RIME Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has rejected calls for the government to separate the non-Muslim affairs portfolio from the Prime Minister's Department (Religious Affairs).

He said the proposal had not been agreed upon by any party in the government, let alone the cabinet.

Anwar added that Raub member of parliament Chow Yu Hui's suggestion for the portfolio of the Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Religious Affairs) to be split into two was a personal opinion.

"The existing channels are sufficient. There are (currently) the religious affairs minister and the national unity minister. There is

also a harmony committee representing all ethnicities and religions," he said after performing prayers at As-Salam Mosque in Puchong Perdana yesterday.

Anwar also said any appointment for ministerial portfolios was at the discretion of the prime minister.

Unity government spokesman Fahmi Fadzil said Chow's suggestion did not reflect the stance of DAP's leadership.

"The proposal raised by the Raub MP was discussed in today's (yesterday's) meeting, and it was never brought up by the party leaders themselves.

"They have stated that it is not their official position but merely a personal opinion.

"It is also not the party's stance, and the cabinet has never raised this matter," he said at his post-cabinet press briefing yesterday.

Chow had suggested that the government follow the example set by Penang, Perak, and Negri Sembilan, where executive councillors are appointed to manage non-Islamic affairs at the state level.

He recommended appointing a second minister for non-Islamic affairs, ideally a respected leader from the non-Muslim community, to ensure fair representation for all religious groups.

On a separate issue, Anwar said the government had identified a candidate to be Malaysia's next envoy to the United States.

However, Anwar said the candidate must receive consent from His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim, King of Malaysia.

"There is a candidate,' but as usual, the process requires the consent of the king.

"So, God-willing, once I return from Bahrain next week and have an audience with the king, we can finalise the matter."

Meanwhile, Polity executive chairman Nurul Izzah Anwar believed that Malaysia's next envoy to the US should be a robust and deeply prepared ambassador.

Nurul Izzah, who is also PKR vice-president, said this was necessary to navigate challenging international relations.

She, however, refused to comment on former Bangi MP Ong Kian Ming's proposal for the government to consider five people, including her, for the position.

Outgoing ambassador to the US Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz said on Feb 8 that his two-year term as ambassador had concluded, adding that he was merely a political appointee and not a career diplomat. **Additional reporting by Ilya Marsya Iskandar**