



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim speaking at the launch of the National Historians Council in Putrajaya yesterday. NSTP PIC BY MOHD FADLI HAMZAH

NATIONAL HISTORIANS COUNCIL

PM: SHAPE OUR OWN HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Historiography and history vital in shaping cultural identity, says Anwar

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MALAYSIA has reached the point where it must build its own historical narrative and establish a civilisation that can be recognised and studied globally, said Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

The prime minister, at the launch of the National Historians Council at the Putrajaya International Convention Centre (IPCC) here, said history and historiography were vital disciplines that not only record events but also critique, interpret and analyse them in ways that shape cultural identity.

"Historiography is about deeper analysis. It should not be assumed that today's effort is the first attempt to 'correct' Malaysian history. Many earlier works supported this idea. Our task now is to continue the discourse, harness these strengths, and provide advice to the government on what more needs to be done," he said.

Anwar said history must be studied from both empirical and moral perspectives, guided by

values that reflect civilisation and culture.

"History is not merely about recording events, but about highlighting what is noble, recognised, and refined, so that these values are firmly instilled in society."

He recalled the early efforts of the 1961 Asian Historians Conference, acknowledging that while not all earlier initiatives were perfect, they helped lay the foundations of Malaysia's intellectual tradition.

He also drew on Belgian historian Henri Pirenne's writings, which argued that Europe's modernity and rationalism only emerged after its encounter with Islamic civilisation.

"When we study our own history, we must not disregard earlier influences, particularly Islam, which brought profound change to our culture — from food and clothing to daily practices and ways of thinking about what is right and wrong."

He cautioned against worrying trends such as declining reading habits and waning interest in history, which he described as unhealthy.

Stressing the importance of balance, Anwar said: "This does not mean we neglect new technologies like artificial intelligence, mathematics and engineering. These are essential. But we are also human, with culture and identity. These cannot be separated from history, literature and heritage.

"Without balance, we risk following an unhealthy path."

Anwar also called for museums and archives to be made more engaging and accessible, particularly for young people.

"The museums must not only showcase technology, but embody culture, history and art. It must keep our heritage alive, while sparking public interest, especially among students."

He said that history should never be seen as a minor discipline, but as vital knowledge about society and culture, especially in a developing nation like Malaysia.

The National Historians Council, approved by the cabinet on Jan 24, held its inaugural meeting in conjunction with its launch.

The 17-member body comprises 10 historians, two archaeologists, two anthropologists and sociologists, as well as three representatives from the National Unity Ministry, Higher Education Ministry and Education Ministry.

The council's term runs from Aug 1 until July 31, 2027, during which it will oversee research, referencing, writing, publishing, history education, and advocacy to ensure Malaysia's heritage and contributions are properly recorded and preserved.

Present were National Unity Minister Datuk Seri Aaron Ago Dagang, his deputy Saraswathy Kandasami and Dewan Rakyat Speaker Tan Sri Johari Abdul.