

WREATH-LAYING AT MAUSOLEUM

PM: Paying respects to Ataturk part of diplomatic protocol

ISTANBUL: The wreath-laying ceremony at the Mausoleum of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the Republic of Turkiye, is part of an official protocol that must be observed by all heads of state during their official visits to the country.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said the ceremony did not carry any political message or the ideological stance of any leader.

He said the confusion and criticism from a small segment of Malaysians over the matter stemmed from a lack of understanding of the historical background and context of the era in which Ataturk lived.

"I don't think many people truly understand this. The fact is, all heads of state or government on official visits to Turkiye are required to observe this ceremony," he said at a press conference on the final day of his official visit to Turkiye.

Anwar said the act of paying respects should be viewed within Turkiye's historical context, particularly the role played by Ataturk in leading the resistance against attempts by the Allied

powers after World War 1 to fragment the territory of the Ottoman Empire, which ultimately led to the country's liberation and the formation of the modern republic.

He said the people of Turkiye viewed Ataturk as a leader who defended their homeland from European colonisation — and this perception underpins the high level of respect the country continues to accord him today.

The prime minister said he personally disagreed with some of Ataturk's decisions and policies concerning Islam, including changes to the language of the call to prayer, writing systems and administrative aspects.

"There are policies and decisions of his that I do not agree with and that do not align with my stance, but his contribution to saving the country from colonisation cannot be erased."

Commenting on the criticism directed at him in Malaysia, Anwar described it as arising from hasty judgments and a lack of historical understanding.

Separately, Anwar received a visit from former international footballer Mesut Ozil during a



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim with the Turkiye president's son, Necmeddin Bilal Erdogan (left), and former international footballer Mesut Ozil during a meeting in Istanbul on Thursday, **BERNAMA** PIC

meeting here.

He said the meeting provided an opportunity for them to share experiences and exchange views on various current issues, including matters concerning the interests of Muslims and the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

"As a Manchester United supporter, I had the opportunity to receive a visit from former Ar-

senal star Mesut Ozil in Istanbul.

"He is now actively involved in Turkiye's AK Party," said Anwar in a statement.

The prime minister praised Ozil for his continued commitment to various international humanitarian initiatives.

"On a light-hearted side, our conversation also touched on my

grandchild, who is a die-hard supporter of The Gunners.

"This brought a smile to his face," he said.

Anwar also took the opportunity to invite Ozil to visit Malaysia to share his experiences related to football, leadership, humanitarian values and the role of youth in championing justice and global solidarity.