

No place for 'sakau and songlap'

PM: Reforms, clean-up needed in Armed Forces

By **RAHIMY RAHIM**
and **YASMIN ABDUL LATIF**
newsdesk@thestar.com.my

KUALA LUMPUR: There is no more place for the "sakau and songlap" (embezzle and misappropriate) culture that has been rampant in the country's defence and security procurement.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, in calling for urgent reforms, said the government will focus on strengthening governance and oversight of such institutions.

"We know that (the issue of) procurement is not a concern unique to Malaysia," said Anwar, who is also Finance Minister.

"For those following developments in the defence industry and procurement, this is one of the areas where 'sakau and songlap' are most aggressive," he said when launching the National Defence Industry Policy (DIPN) here yesterday.

"With the assurance provided by the Defence Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin, we are starting with strong governance and robust management practices," said Anwar.

Anwar added that the practice of giving out commissions, once tied mainly to political leaders, was now spreading to the civil service, the Armed Forces, and enforcement agencies, including Customs and Immigration departments.

He said urgent reforms under DIPN will tighten oversight and ensure all procurement is transparent and accountable, with the Defence Minister leading the effort.

"Without cleaning the system, we cannot strengthen or elevate our institutions," he said.

"That is why I want to emphasise that colleagues in enforcement agencies and the nation's defence sector, most importantly the Armed Forces, must always ensure national security through full preparedness.

"We can no longer tolerate any form of corrupt practices that harm not only the nation but the industry itself.

"Imagine the expectations of the entire country on a single force to safeguard our security, our children, and our future being undermined by personal interests.

"How can we set a defence policy or procure the best weaponry if we are still dragged down by personal interests, commissions, and accumulation of wealth?" asked Anwar.

Meanwhile, Anwar said that isolated cases still under investigation should not undermine the overall reputation of the Armed Forces and other enforcement agencies.

The Prime Minister said such cases must not be allowed to represent the entire personnel of the Armed Forces, enforcement agencies or ministries.

"The overwhelming majority fully understand their responsibilities.

"I do not want the misconduct of a small minority, although it is still under investigation and subject to court decisions, to tarnish the reputation and dignity of military officers at all levels who serve with professionalism and honour.

"I hope they remain steadfast, disciplined and firm when carrying out their duties," said Anwar.

On Jan 12, the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) said it will complete the investiga-



Defence boost: Anwar visiting the exhibits after launching the National Defence Industry Policy. Looking on is Khaled (on Anwar's left). - AZMAN GHANI/The Star

tion involving a senior military officer within a week.

MACC chief commissioner Tan Sri Azam Baki said investigators concluded recording the officer's statement at about 5pm on Monday at the commission's headquarters.

The MACC has also recommended that several senior military officers be charged following the completion of investigations

under Ops Star and Ops Parasite.

"We now await further instructions from the deputy public prosecutor's office," he was quoted as saying.