

PM: HEED RULE OF LAW ON SENSITIVE ISSUES

Need for patience when there are elements of racial conflict, religious issues, says Anwar

QISTINA SALLEHUDDIN AND
AUSTIN CAMOENS
KUALA LUMPUR
news@nst.com.my



Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim

THE rule of law must be upheld in managing sensitive issues involving places of worship, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Responding to the controversy over the relocation of a temple at Jalan Masjid India to make way for a mosque, Anwar said there was never any plan to demolish the temple.

“Yes, we might be patient with views and critics, but we cannot be patient when there are elements of racial conflict, religious issues or corruption.

“(The temple (was built) without approval on the land, whether it was previously under Kuala Lumpur City Hall or now (owned) by a company.

“(But) the legal process must be followed, as this is a country governed by the rule of law. To uphold the law, we negotiated peacefully.

“There was never any intention to demolish it, but that has become the malicious narrative,” he said at the 218th Police Day celebration here yesterday.

Anwar said several quarters made extreme criticism against the government.

“What are they implying? That I, as a Muslim, want to destroy Hindu worshippers? Absolutely not. My faith has never taught me to be hostile or to destroy the property of others.

“A mosque in Lahad Datu was also demolished because it did not comply with regulations.

“For us, this country must be governed by the rule of law. Whether a mosque or a temple has existed for 10 years or 100 years, we must review the situation,” he said.

Anwar, however, said the government could not relocate all temples built without land permits. He said there were 130 unlicensed temples in Kuala Lumpur, 300 in Kedah and several in Perak.

“This is why I have taken this approach because I believe in patience and resolving matters amicably.

“Yet, on one side, extreme Is-

lamic groups attack me, accusing me of bowing to Hindu demands.

“On the other, extreme Hindu groups accuse me of trying to Islamise everything, especially because the mosque in question is to be named Masjid Madani.

“My friends suggested I change the mosque’s name, but what kind of cowardly leader would I be if I did that?”

“We are not doing anything wrong. The land belongs to the company, I have checked all the facts.

“As such, a leader must have a firm stance on such issues. Do not be oppressive. Do not act unjustly, but also, do not do nothing.”

Anwar said differences between races and religions must be properly discussed to ensure that harmony in the country is maintained.

“Discuss things properly, we are partners and friends, not enemies. Do not portray us as oppressive, and do not listen to provocateurs.

“So, follow the regulations. While we are giving the temple space to relocate properly, our instructions remain consistent... do not in any way disturb or complicate religious practices,” he said.

Anwar said the groundbreaking ceremony for the mosque in Jalan Masjid India would proceed tomorrow.

Page 1 pic: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim chatting with some police personnel at the 218th Police Day celebration held at the Police Training Centre in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.