

Anwar: If I were PM ...

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KUALA LUMPUR, May 26 — One way he would improve racial ties in Malaysia if he were prime minister, said opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, would be to stop awarding scholarships to the children of government ministers.

Describing his experience when his eldest daughter Nurul Izzah — now Member of Parliament for Lembah Pantai in Kuala Lumpur — went to university, Anwar said he was told he needn't pay her fees as she was "automatically" given a scholarship.

But Anwar, who was then deputy prime minister and finance minister, persisted and the university eventually accepted his payment.

"This has to be stopped," he said of the practice, which has angered families of poor Chinese and Indian students who qualified for assistance but did not receive it.

Speaking at a lunch yesterday organised by the Foreign Correspondents Association of Singapore, Anwar touched on a variety of topics, including racial harmony, Malaysia's New Economic Policy (NEP) and his long-time political foe, former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Lauding the efforts of Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng, Anwar said the secretary-general of the DAP sets a good example of how to work with different races.

"Here is a Chinese leader who talks about the Malay problem, the Indian problem," he said. *"If we do this, we will win every by-election and general election."*

Anwar was also sceptical about Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's pledge that the controversial NEP would be reviewed. The policy gives privileges in government contracts, jobs, business, property purchases and education to Malays, and has resulted in a lack of opportunities for the minority races.

"He announced it here in Singapore, that he wants to dismantle the NEP, (but) nothing has happened since. You dismantle it in place of what?" asked Anwar. *"Do you still continue the old ways of disbursing funds to selected companies and to your cronies?"*

The opposition, on the other hand, outlined a plan several years ago to replace the NEP, said Anwar, one that would make Malaysia compete aggressively with economies like South Korea and Taiwan.

On Mahathir, Anwar said the former prime minister performed *"remarkably well"* in terms of reforming the country. He pointed out that the elder statesman had risen to prominence, though he did not come from an influential political family.

Anwar was heir apparent to Dr Mahathir until he was sacked in 1998 after being hit with sodomy and corruption charges. He served six years in jail for corruption but was later cleared of sodomy. The pair has been trading barbs over the years through the media.

Replying to a question on what he would say about Mahathir if he were writing his biography, Anwar said: *"He had a very strong passion and desire to undertake necessary changes to make Malaysia*

great. I was persuaded to join (Umno) because of that.”

However, with time, Dr Mahathir became “too confident” and thought of Malaysia as his “own property”.

“I believe Malaysia has to move on beyond not only Mahathir,” Anwar said, “but also beyond old, obsolete policies and parties such as Umno and BN.” — Today

P.S.

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