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School safety 'falling short'

PM: More needs to be done on top of existing measures



Making a point: Anwar replying to a query during Prime Minister's Question Time in the Dewan Rakyat. — Bernama

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KUALA LUMPUR: School safety measures are still falling short, warns Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

He said the Education Ministry had put in place measures ranging from hostel monitoring and safety audits to counselling and mental health support.

"Is it enough? Not yet," he said during Prime Minister's Question Time in the Dewan Rakyat.

Anwar said 5,681 bullying cases were reported in schools from January to August this year, but the real figure could be higher as many cases were never reported.

Anwar cited the case of Irene Sofiya Mohd Khairool Faisal in Johor as the latest, following that of Zara Qairina Mahathir in Sabah last year and others in Kelantan, Selangor and Negri Sembilan.

While action against bullying must be swift and firm, the Prime Minister pointed to the size of the task, with 10,259 schools, 5.13 million pupils and 428,379 teachers nationwide.

Parents, he said, must play their part too, and questioned how some did not even know whether their children had come home.

"I don't mean to blame parents, but the family unit must be the foundation. A nation stands on strong family units," he said.

To get parents through the school gates, Anwar proposed that aid, currently paid directly into their bank accounts, be handed out at schools instead so parents would have to turn up and meet teachers.

He proposed this in reply to Sri Gading MP Datuk Aminolhuda Hassan's question on what could be done to get more parents to attend parent-teacher association meetings.

Responding to a supplementary question by Indera Mahkota MP Datuk Seri Saifuddin Abdullah, the Prime Minister said various measures had been taken to curb the problem, including increasing the number of counselling teachers as well as assistant wardens at hostels.

Anwar said the police had also been authorised to enter school premises at any time while in uniform, in addition to training 400 wardens in psychosocial skills and support.

"The powers of principals, headmasters and disciplinary committees have also been strengthened, while disciplinary powers can be delegated to teachers.

"We have also improved the student discipline system, carried out advocacy efforts, outlined student protection policy for schools and implemented mental health screening, following issues concerning mental health that had been raised," he said.

Another RM15mil would be set aside next year for CCTV cameras at 1,000 schools, he said, and also backed the police's call for schools not to hide cases to protect their reputation.

"They hide it to protect the school's good name without thinking of the harm to the child. That is not proper education," he added.

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