

## Anwar: Education must have soul and excellence

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KUALA LUMPUR: The authorities in charge of higher educational institutions have to be wary about "forced goals" of modern education.

"What we need is both soul and excellence. It is not enough to have soul but no excellence or excellence and no soul," said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

"Character and ethics are both important in education.

"I had a colleague in university who said that at least (our educational institutions) have soul.

"Harvard University (in the US) has excellence but no soul. We have soul but no excellence – I am not too sure if I agree.

"With humanity here, it is better to admit a little soul and a little excellence (in educational institutions)," he said.

Anwar said character development must be the primary goal in education.

He was speaking at the launch of the book *Knowledge, Tradition and Civilisation: Essays in honour of Professor Osman Bakar* at the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation-International Islamic University Malaysia (Istac-IIUM) yesterday.

Anwar said public education must create a workforce with developed character.

While vocational skills, sciences as well as humanities are crucial elements, we must never forget that the primary rationale for public education is character development, he said.

He also called on the ministries in charge of education to include Islamic civilisational studies at every level and emphasise universal values and humanity in the current syllabus of Islamic religious studies in educational institutions.

"Islamic civilisation, too, is long overdue in the national curriculum at all levels," said Anwar.

Speaking to the media after the event, he said Muslims must also be willing to question what was taught and not follow blindly.

"There are suggestions from scholars such as Professor Osman who stated that the Islamic religious studies being taught in schools must be reviewed to ensure that what is taught gives a better understanding of character and universal humanity.

"Many a time, Islam is taught by quoting authorities and fatwas are issued (by authorities) based on their own understanding. Sometimes, when we question (the fatwas), they said it is not right (to do so).

"If the teachers take a wrong action, it must be questioned. Just because a person is head of a political party, that does not mean all his statements are right. Islam did not teach us to do so (follow blindly).

"Islamic religious education should be based on deep understanding of the Quran, sunnah (traditions and practices of Prophet Muhammad) and the earliest of ulamas. Interpretations must be questioned and corrected if need be. That is the tradition of seeking knowledge," said Anwar.

Although he did not mention any name, it is likely Anwar was referring to PAS leaders, as some of them are also known as "ulamas" among their followers.

Also at the event were Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin and top heads of IIUM.

The book, edited by Prof Dr Syed Khairuddin Aljunied, is a collection of essays by 25 distinguished individuals from all over the world in honour of Prof Osman, including an essay by Anwar himself.