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PKR president-elect Anwar Ibrahim has said that when watching Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad being sworn in on May 10, he felt that it should have been him and not Mahathir.

Channel News Asia quoted Anwar as saying this during a two-hour dialogue session with Singaporean students at the Singapore Management University (SMU) today.

To a question on what was going through his mind when watching Mahathir's oath-taking ceremony following Pakatan Harapan's general election victory, Anwar replied: "You want me to be honest or politically correct? Politically correct, of course, I rejoiced, everybody was so elated.

"Look, Mahathir swearing in, (signalling a) new era for Malaysia. He came up with a statement saying that once Harapan wins, they will then submit an application to the king for immediate pardon (for me).

"But I also felt that I should have been there, you know? I did, I did. I do not want to lie to you, I did think about this [...] it should be me, not you."

The report said Anwar's response drew laughter from the crowd.

Anwar was still serving the prison sentence at the time for his second sodomy conviction and had watched the swearing-in ceremony from a hospital ward following a surgery.

Anwar told another student that it was unfair to compare the republic with Malaysia in terms of political reform as the latter, prior to GE14, was at a stage of "going down the drain" due to endemic corruption and discrimination.

'Democratic spirit'

On the decision by the Malaysian cabinet to lower the voting age from 21 to 18, Anwar said he was "very much" for the decision.

Asked about factions in his party PKR between the camps of deputy president Azmin Ali and vice-president Rafizi Ramli, Anwar insisted that the rivalry between the two would not divide the party.

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Rafizi is contesting the party's No 2 post against Azmin in the upcoming party election.

Anwar said that in a democracy, differences must be tolerated. "You must accept the fact that there are people who are campaigning."

"The vibrancy of the party and the democratic spirit is that they continue to enter the race, (and contest to) win the elections.

"But it is my duty then as president to bring them together and give a suitable role for the person that has been defeated in the party elections.

"Because after all, this is an election among members of the family," he reportedly said.