

20 MAR 1996

Anwar-Press

ASIAN MEDIA SHOULD ENCOURAGE HEALTHY EXCHANGE OF IDEAS, SAYS ANWAR

KUALA LUMPUR, March 20 (Bernama) -- The media in Asia should promote healthy debate on issues of public concern, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said today.

Opening the 11th Genral Assembly of the Confederation of Asean Journalists (CAJ) here, he said they should serve as a vehicle for the contest of ideas and cultivate good taste.

He added: "Asian societies are at a state of development where they are in greater need for a vigorous journalism.

"We still have to root out corruption and abuses of power in its many forms."

More than 120 representatives from CAJ affiliates and dialogue partners from China, Japan, Europe and other Asia-Pacific countries are attending the six-day triennial assembly.

Anwar reminded the media that in affirming the freedom of the press, they must not lose their sense of proportion.

The pursuit of freedom must go hand in hand with the quest of justice, he said.

He added: "The claims of religion and morality are equally great if not greater. In the context of Asian society, they set the proper limits of individual freedom or, rather, provide the compass in pursuing freedom."

Speaking to reporters later, he said he believed the Asian media was moving towards meeting public expectations of a freer and responsible press.

He was also asked about steps to be taken to solve the problem of illegal immigrants taking over government land and building houses -- an issue highlighted in the local media.

Anwar said it was not acceptable for immigrant workers to take over government land to build their settlements.

Echoing Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement that the government had to act to correct the situation, he said companies, industries or estates should shoulder the responsibility of providing adequate housing for their foreign workers.

On the just-ended Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum Finance Ministers meeting in Japan which he attended, Anwar said developing countries could not be expected to solve the problem of the fluctuations of the Japanese Yen and US dollar.

The onus, he said, should be on Japan and the United States.

Although Malaysia was no longer interested in yen loans, the country still had to repay its old loans, taken 10 to 15 years ago, at very high interest rates.

"So in the name of overseas assistance, what actually happens is a very exploitative system in operation," he said.

Anwar said Malaysia was fortunate that it was able to repay the loans, making pre-payment even and it no longer required to borrow.

"Not all countries in Asia or in the world are in that state," he added.

Asked if there was an alternative, he said: "I'm not saying that they (the Japanese) should cancel the repayment but they should be fair, look at original amount, put a fair interest on top of that and let us pay. We are happy to pay very fast." -- BERNAMA

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