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Anwar-Luncheon (With pix)

GLOBAL NEED TO ADDRESS PEOPLES' GRIEVANCES, SAYS ANWAR

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 9 (Bernama) -- The need for a global civil society to address the peoples' legitimate grievances and their demands for increased transparency and accountability in government has become increasingly urgent, says Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

The Deputy Prime Minister said Asian traditions do place a premium on ethical ideals with regard to governance, seeking justice as the ultimate end and prescribing uprightness as a cardinal principle.

In a luncheon address at the end of the two-day Second Pacific Dialogue today, Anwar said: "Whilst in the West, the criticism against the powers that be is filled with vigour, albeit increasingly rancorous, Asians should not be seen as being completely benign towards holders of public office."

The recent revelations about corruption in high places in certain countries exemplified this growing trend in Asia where business as usual was fast becoming unusual, he added.

Some 50 top political and business leaders, senior government officers and academics from 13 countries attended the dialogue, jointly organised by the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), Institute for Policy Research and the United States Asia-Pacific Policy Centre (APPC).

Anwar said: "It certainly exposes the venality of Asian governments. But corruption knows no national boundaries.

"The malady afflicts societies, East and West, as evident in no less sensational exposes in Europe in the not-too-distant past and the unrelenting push for campaign reforms and election funding in the United States.

"Corruption is essentially a moral issue that offends the conscience of any society."

He went on to say that Asia could not proceed alone in seeking emancipation for its people as it needed others as much as it relied on its own strength.

But he warned that as economic integration in the Asia-Pacific region progresses, the price to pay for unsound policies would be increasingly heavy.

Therefore, to avoid costly mistakes, Asians need to frame policies based on understanding of complex socio-cultural realities rather than naive popular perceptions, he said.

"We cannot, and must not, succumb to the stereotypes perpetuated and amplified by the sound bite," he added.

In this respect, the growing realisation in the West of the importance of religion and family in the nurturing of a nation was most welcomed.

He said that awareness of these principles, once dismissed as the preoccupation of an unenlightened East, manifested the convergence of Asian ideals and aspirations.

He added: "However, in pursuing religious and moral revivalism, we must not allow our cause to be hijacked by the rabid ayatollahs of moral and cultural extremism, be they from the East or from the West.

"We need to rethink the conventional wisdoms, the accepted notions on policies, from human rights to poverty eradication, to the seductive mantra of free markets as the cure-all for every ill that afflicts our societies."

Anwar also said that in Asia, governments have a proper role not only in promoting economic growth but also in correcting economic imbalances and

ensuring social justice.

He said the economic revival of East Asia would deliver some 2 billion people from the shackles of poverty and this would certainly be among the most welcome phenomena in human history.

"It is doubtful, however, that this can be achieved without the dedication and commitment to the genuine welfare of the people among those in authority," he added.

According to Anwar, the growth of civil society and economic prosperity would not be possible without regional stability and, therefore, a collective, credible and reliable security system was needed.

Thus, he stressed that a strong interdependibility, economic and political, should be established to forestall any ambition of military adventurism.

"The nurturing of democracy and civil society, in tandem with economic growth, is our best guarantee for regional peace and security for future generations," he said.

Spaking to reporters at the end of the dialogue, Anwar said the East should continue to be considered as a strength and no one should force Asia to follow their attitude based on their experiences.

"In the cultural aspects, there seemed to be the understanding that there are differences between the East and the West, he said.

He said in the cultural aspects, there were delegates who felt that Asia could be a model for strength that could be utilised.

He said the dialogue between Asia and America had brought good results because it was not aimed at finding faults but rather to find more understanding.

"For example, we do not view the development and progress in China as a threat," he added.

Anwar said such a dialogue was the best way of creating understanding and reducing tensions among nations.

He said the deegates from 13 countries also raised matters relating to regional security like the Spratley issue, nuclear tests and North Korea.

The majority of them welcomed the views of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who questioned the wisdom of rushing to acquire sophisticated weapons.

Dr Mahathir had said that such an action would only serve to their detriment.

Asked on the reaction of delegates, Anwar said this was an attempt to to solve ideas by airing their views or obtain a general consensus on issues such as those of political nature.--Bernama