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Anwar for talks with Suharto on region's economic situation

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim will meet Indonesian President Suharto in Jakarta tomorrow to discuss the financial and economic situation in the region.

"We normally compare notes and seek each other's views on the matter," he told reporters tonight after delivering a keynote address at the Third Regional Ethics in Leadership Conference at Hotel Istana.

He said tomorrow's meeting was part of a series of discussions he and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad would have with leaders in the region.

Dr Mahathir will be meeting Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai and President Fidel Ramos of the Philippines this week while Anwar is scheduled to hold talks with Japanese and Taiwanese leaders next week.

Anwar said during tomorrow's meeting, he would follow up on matters discussed by Suharto and Dr Mahathir during their meeting in the Indonesian capital two weeks ago.

He also confirmed that the Asean Finance Ministers would meet this month ahead of the G-7 Summit.

However, he dismissed a suggestion that the meeting would be held in London, saying it would take place in one of the Asean capitals.

Earlier, Anwar said the current economic problems would cause countries in the region to re-evaluate the position of ethics in every level of their social and government system.

He said the source of the present "malaise or turbulence" was partly ethical, since the uncontrolled attempt to generate wealth and profit had overshadowed moral and ethical considerations.

Anwar added that there might have been shortcomings in the region's economic development with excesses, corruption, nepotism and cronyism causing the most damage.

Stressing that Asean should not be apologetic, he, however, said these problems should be overcome with reforms and transformation, and greater transparency in the government and business sectors.

"If there is anything that we can learn from the experience of the last few months, it is to seek greater change, transformation or reforms."

Anwar said if the economic problems necessitated changes, reviews and re-assessment, these should be done.

He said one should be glad that the problems had forced many countries to undertake reforms as in some countries, changes like the dismantling of flawed social and political systems could only be achieved through a revolution.

Anwar, who spoke at great length on the demand and pressure for greater transparency, said he could not understand why the need to do so was always perceived as a "Western prescription."

He questioned why one tended to assume that greater transparency was something known to be the norm and practice in the West, adding that this value was also evident in several cultures in the East.

The Deputy Prime Minister concluded that the economic woes would lead to the emergence of stronger Asian economies, which were equally committed to ethical and moral concerns.

Anwar repudiated the common belief that all economic and social remedies prescribed by the West and Western-led international agencies were always the best.

"They always assume that they have the answer to everything ... this is arrogant (attitude) and clearly going against the principle of ethics."

He reminded the audience that the prescribed remedies always failed to take into consideration the complexities of the recipient countries, their various stages of development and problems, sometimes at the expense of social upheavals.

Also present were St James Ethics Centre executive director Dr Simon Longstaff, Institute of Strategic and International Studies chairman Tan Sri Dr Noordin Sopiee and Deputy Primary Industries Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein.

The five-day conference is jointly organised by Isis and St James Ethics Centre of Australia.

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