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Anwar takes time off to enjoy Asean art works

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DEPUTY Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim took some time off yesterday to appreciate art.

He said the exhibition was welcomed in times of economic distress and gave him temporary relief from mundane cares and concerns.

Many corporate leaders, he said, have also learnt to appreciate works of art as they often transcend situations and are produced during good times and bad.

Anwar also said that the role of artists cannot be over-emphasised as their works project the soul of the community.

"An artist's work manifests and externalises the inward growth of our society. Their articulation contributes towards a self-definition of the society.

"While the artist himself may be interested in only self-expression, that expression helps his society to understand its identity," Anwar said when opening the Asean Masterworks exhibition at the National Art Gallery in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Anwar said contemplating the Asean paintings was like gazing at the soul of Asean in their myriad reflections.

"Our attempt to understand these works is, in a way, our attempt to understand ourselves. Thus, we owe a profound gratitude to our artists, for they have captured the images of our psychic and inner lives."

He said the artists help to define the Asean spirit and entity. Their works are also indirectly integrating the regional grouping and as the process accelerates, Asean's self-definition is sharpened.

"We have to express and articulate the building blocks of our entity. Mutual interest and the pursuit of prosperity, although temporarily halted, are strong reasons for coming together."

Anwar said the nurturing of a sense of community requires the bond of idealistic ingredients and the quest for these ingredients, and their articulation was the task of the artist.

The exhibition, which is open to the public, features 60 artworks by 60 artists from the Asean countries and will be on display until February 7.

The collection was originally opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on December 15 at the Palace of the Golden Horses to coincide with the Asean Summit 1997. At that time, it was restricted to delegation members attending the summit and special guests.

Also present yesterday was Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik.

The exhibition is the brainchild of Tan Sri Ahmad Kamil Jaafar, special envoy of the Prime Minister.

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