

'BE ACCOUNTABLE AT ALL TIMES'

**People's
representatives
must uphold
constitution, says
Anwar**

HAKIM MAHARI
KUALA LUMPUR
hakimahari@nst.com.my

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has reminded Asean parliamentarians that leaders must be accountable to the people at all times.

He said democracy was not just about voting, but about governments and parliamentarians upholding their constitutions and respecting citizens' rights to question them.

"Whatever you do, you must honour the spirit of the constitution, your oath of office and the right of citizens to question (their leaders and governments)," he said in his keynote address at the 46th Asean Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) General Assembly.

The event, held in Kuala Lumpur from Sept 16 to 22, gathers lawmakers from Asean member states to discuss regional cooperation under the theme "Parliaments at the Forefront for Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Asean".

Present were AIPA president and Dewan Rakyat Speaker Tan Sri Johari Abdul and AIPA secretary-general Siti Rozaimeryanty Abdul Rahman.

Malaysia is the current chair of the 10-member Asean bloc.

Anwar said democracy was not just about elections every few years, but about a system where

the ruling party could be held accountable by the public.

"Democracy is not just about elections every four or five years. It is about a system that allows the ruling party to be questioned and criticised," he said.

Anwar said recent developments in the region had shown that citizens were no longer willing to accept leaders who acted to entrench their own power or privileges instead of serving the people.

He said the events had been "quite a shock", putting both governments and parliaments on guard.

"Parliamentarians today are being questioned, whether they use their influence for the better benefit of citizens or simply to entrench themselves.

"The past few weeks have shown that people will not stay silent when leaders forget their responsibilities," he said.

He added that social media had amplified scrutiny and gave the people, especially youth, greater access to political developments.

While this increased transparency, Anwar warned it also carried risks if not balanced with responsible leadership.

"There are times people can be misled. Notwithstanding that, our duty is to honour our commitment and our oath of office to the best of our ability," he said.

He also praised parliamentary speakers for upholding accountability, reminding delegates that even the prime minister was bound by their authority in the Dewan Rakyat.

"Whatever power I may have as prime minister, when I am in the House, I am fully subjected to the speaker's decision.

"And I must tell you, although the speaker is my friend, there are many decisions I personally do not like or agree with."