

M'sia ready to lead Asean with clarity, calls for collective leadership

Malaysiakini

17 February 2025

Bernama

Malaysia stands ready to lead Asean with clarity and conviction as the bloc's chair for the year, said Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim.

However, Anwar emphasised that leadership is not the sole responsibility of governments and urged businesses, academics, entrepreneurs and civil society to play a role in shaping an inclusive, sustainable and resilient future.

"Asean's moment is now. We must act with urgency, unity and ambition to secure a prosperous future for all. This is not a time for incrementalism or short-term thinking.

"It is a time for bold decisions, transformative partnerships and a shared commitment to long-term prosperity," he said during his keynote address at the China Conference Southeast Asia 2025 in Kuala Lumpur today.

Also present were Investment, Trade and Industry Minister Tengku Zafrul Abdul Aziz and Bank Negara Malaysia Governor Abdul Rasheed Ghaffour.

As Malaysia deepens its role in Asean and strengthens its collaboration with China, Anwar also urged all relevant parties to be part of this vision.

“Let us build a future based on trust, innovation and shared aspirations,” said the premier.

The conference, organised by the South China Morning Post, has gathered more than 700 government officials, diplomats, global business leaders, scholars and thought leaders from around the world.

Throughout today's sessions, the conference will examine the ever-evolving China-Asean relationship and discuss the strategic importance of stronger ties between China, the world's second-largest economy, and Asean, the world's most dynamic economic bloc.

Focus on transformational partnership

Anwar said that Asean must move beyond traditional trade and investment figures. Instead, it should focus on a partnership that is transformational and future-oriented, he added.

He stressed that Asean must move beyond reacting to global shifts and lead.

“We must lead. Our success depends on how well we integrate new technologies, develop robust economic frameworks and secure a more equitable and sustainable future for all,” he said.

Anwar noted that Malaysia stands at the heart of significant global uncertainties and transformation and is not a mere bystander in the shifting tides of geopolitics and economics.

“We are active participants, working with our partners to build a future that is resilient and innovative,” he said.

Ties with China

China, he added, has been Asean's most significant economic partner for years, and this relationship will continue to be a cornerstone of regional stability.

“However, as global economic dynamics evolve, our engagement must also adapt to new challenges and opportunities,” he pointed out.

In addition, the prime minister said that the next phase of Asean-China economic cooperation must be driven by strategic technological collaboration, sustainable growth, and human capital development.

“We must embrace and support the integration of artificial intelligence into regional supply chains, ensuring that Asean remains at the forefront of the digital economy,” he added.

At the same time, Anwar noted that expanding cooperation in renewable energy, green industries, and sustainable infrastructure is vital to fostering long-term resilience and environmental responsibility.

“Equally important is the empowerment of Asean’s workforce, equipping our people with the necessary skills to navigate and thrive in an evolving digital landscape,” he said.

He added that the bloc’s connectivity with China must extend beyond enhancing trade efficiency as it must drive shared prosperity.

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