

Defending Asean centrality, promoting active non-alignment – Anwar

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Bernama

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim reiterated that Malaysia, as chair for Asean 2025, is committed to defending Asean's centrality and promoting its active non-alignment.

Speaking at the 22nd Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore today, he cautioned against a new orthodoxy that not only affects how diplomacy is viewed but also how security will be structured, risking the fragmentation of the regional architecture and undermining Southeast Asia's strategic autonomy.

“Preserving our autonomy is not about resisting others. It is about strengthening ourselves. This, in essence, is what Asean centrality is about.

“We do not object to like-minded partners talking among themselves. But coalitions that build walls instead of bridges, stoke arms competition, or undermine the legitimacy of multilateralism should give us pause.

“A stable region is not one braced for conflict, but one grounded in openness,

transparency, and habit-forming cooperation,” he said.

He also stressed that Southeast Asia does not need a new Cold War, but rather an equilibrium that promotes cooperation without coercion and balance without bloc politics.

Anwar said that Asean, through decades of consensus-building, was built to foster stability in a region where peace is sustained, freedom is protected, and neutrality is respected.

“If this Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone is a glimpse of what cooperation can achieve at the bilateral level, then Asean is the wider canvas.

“Asean was never meant to dominate or dictate. That foundation still holds,” he said.

Referring to the recently concluded 46th Asean Summit and related summits in Kuala Lumpur, the prime minister described them as substantive and productive summits, where several historic agendas were made.

These include the adoption of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Asean 2045, a decision on Timor-Leste’s admission to the bloc, and the Myanmar situation.

The convening of the Asean-GCC Summit and ASEAN-GCC-China Summit, meanwhile, was said to strengthen Asean's strategic aperture.

South China Sea

Anwar reiterated Malaysia's concern about rising tensions in the South China Sea amid its complex dispute and called for calm, direct, and consistent engagement with all parties.

"We have no interest in seeing tensions spiral into confrontation, least of all in waters so critical to our own security and prosperity.

"We will urge restraint, encourage dialogue, and work to preserve the stability on which this region depends. Above all, we remain steadfast in our principled insistence that all parties uphold the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea," he said.

The prime minister said Malaysia does not subscribe to the concept of spheres of influence, stressing that history has shown how such divisions by major powers often render smaller nations voiceless.

He said that true stability does not come from dividing the world into zones of control, but from creating space for all countries to participate meaningfully in

shaping the global order.

As such, he reaffirmed Malaysia's commitment to pursue an active non-alignment approach in its foreign policy and to maximise its own strategic space.

While welcoming a strong and enduring United States (US) presence in the region, Anwar stressed the importance of maintaining firm and vibrant ties with China, as well as strengthening partnerships across Asia, Europe and the Global South.

"We will engage all who are willing - major powers and middle powers alike - not to set one against the other, but to maximise our own strategic space.

"For Malaysia, this is a deliberate and strategic posture: to help preserve an open region, to assert our sovereignty, and to make our own choices - on our own terms," he said.

- Bernama

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