

ASEAN-AUSTRALIA SUMMIT

TACKLING FUTURE HEALTH CRISES WITH AUSTRALIA

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Asean, Canberra can exchange knowledge and cooperate on capacity-building programmes, says Ismail Sabri

KUALA LUMPUR

ASEAN and Australia should prepare for future public health emergencies and emerging diseases through the exchange of knowledge and capacity-building programmes, including leveraging digital technologies.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob said this at the inaugural Asean-Australia Summit held virtually yesterday.

He said Malaysia appreciated Australia's strong support for Asean's efforts to mitigate the impact of Covid-19.

"Almost A\$700 million has been earmarked for various initiatives.

"This would greatly assist Asean in pursuing its Comprehensive Recovery Framework to implement Asean's recovery strategies and build a future that is sustainable and resilient."

The summit was attended by his Australian counterpart, Scott Morrison.

Ismail Sabri said that since 1974, Asean-Australia dialogue relations had continued to grow and deepen into many areas of

cooperation.

He said Malaysia supported the elevation of Asean-Australia Dialogue Relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership, and this annual engagement at the highest level would strengthen the partnership for mutual benefit.

"Malaysia welcomes the announcement by Prime Minister Morrison on further assistance of A\$124 million for the next 10 years.

"The proposed areas of cooperation are highly relevant. Malaysia looks forward to mutually beneficial projects across the three Asean Community pillars."

He said another area that demanded attention was mental health, which Malaysia, Brunei and Australia had been working together on.

He said Malaysia had launched the Mental Health Strategic Plan 2020-2025 and planned to establish the National Centre of Excellence on Mental Health.

"In this connection, Malaysia looks forward to working with member states and Australia to make mental healthcare more accessible and available through



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob speaking at the virtual 38th and 39th Asean Summits and Related Summits in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. With him are Foreign Minister Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah (left) and Senior International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Azmin Ali. BERNAMA PIC

digital platforms."

He said Malaysia looked forward to the proposed Asean-Australia Mental Health Experts' Meeting.

On education, he underscored the importance of Technical Vocational Education and Training, and how it could contribute to Micro, Small- and Medium-Scale Enterprises (MSMEs) and startups.

He said MSMEs accounted for more than 60 per cent of employment in the region.

"Education is a significant element of Asean-Australia partnership.

"In strengthening the cooperation in this area, Asean can work with Australia to equip underserved communities, including youth, women and children in the region, particularly with critical information and communication technology skills.

"This will assist in upskilling and developing skilled workers.

"It would also enhance the quality of the labour force, increase the effectiveness and efficiency of MSMEs and startups, and ultimately boost the supply chain and manufacturing productivity in the region."

He extended his appreciation to Australia for its participation in the recent Five Power Defence

Agreement "Bersama Gold" exercise.

The summit was held on the sidelines of the three-day virtual 38th and 39th Asean Summits and Related Summits, which began Tuesday under the chairmanship of Brunei.

Separately, at the 24th Asean-Japan Summit, Ismail Sabri called on Asean and Japan to explore the possibility of seconding the country's expert researchers to the Asean Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases to produce vaccines in the region.

He said this would help to address the regional shortage of vaccines and prepare for possible emerging diseases.

Its timely establishment, he added, was vital to assist Asean member states in dire need of assistance to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 and noted Japan's contribution as being important.

"Asean and Japan should enhance multi-disciplinary cooperation in health to better prepare the region to meet future health-related emergencies."

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida attended the summit, his first since being appointed to the top post early this month.

Ismail Sabri said Malaysia ap-

preciated Japan's support and contribution to the Asean Comprehensive Recovery Framework to mitigate the impact of Covid-19, and Japan's vaccine contribution to Asean member states had contributed to these efforts.

Touching on cybersecurity, he said Asean and Japan should consolidate cooperation through the Asean-Japan Cyber Security Capacity Building Centre.

He said Malaysia looked forward to Japan's support in developing a digital security professional development and life-long learning programme aimed at developing cyber security.

He congratulated Japan for hosting the 2020 Olympics and Paralympics during these challenging times. He added that Japan had remained a steadfast friend of Asean since 1973 and the bloc appreciated Japan's support and assistance over the years, which had contributed to Asean community-building efforts.

"We look forward to enhancing Asean-Japan dialogue relations. Malaysia welcomes Japan's proposal to host an in-person special commemorative summit in Japan in 2023 to celebrate 50 years of dialogue relations."

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