

'A unified Asia is a stronger Asia'

Anwar calls for revival of BRI projects

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HAINAN: Asia will emerge stronger and more resilient if it continues to cooperate, speak in a unified voice, and exchange ideas on strategy and best policy practices, says Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Speaking at the annual Boao Forum for Asia (BFA) in this southern Chinese island province, the Prime Minister said Asia should work closely together in a spirit of cooperation and solidarity, strive towards reducing inequality, promoting social justice, and enhancing standards of living for all.

"Translating lofty ideals into practical reality, solidarity and cooperation is best exemplified in the realisation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)," he said when addressing the four-day conference themed "An Uncertain World: Solidarity and Cooperation for Development Amid Challenges" that was earlier declared open by Chinese premier Li Qiang.

Also present was BFA secretary-general Li Baodong.

The BFA, a 29-nation forum, was established in 2001 to promote economic integration across Asia and help build a community with a shared future by facilitating dialogue and exchanges between China and other nations.

China's BRI, coined in 2013 by President Xi Jinping, is a strategy that seeks to connect Asia with Africa and Europe via land and maritime networks to improve regional integration, increase trade, and stimulate economic growth.

As of March 2020, 138 countries have joined BRI.

In his speech, Anwar thanked the Chinese government and BFA for inviting him to attend and address the forum.

He also congratulated Li Qiang on his appointment as Premier of the State Council, adding that he was happy to attend the event as it coincided with the 10th anniversary of the elevation of the Malaysia-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

The BFA theme, Anwar said, was also apt and relevant given the extraordinary ebb and flow of the state of geopolitics, power, and geoeconomics of the present era.

Anwar also explained his unity government's Malaysia Madani concept, which is built on six core values of sustainability, prosperity, innovation, respect, trust, and compassion, and how Asia can achieve solidarity and cooperation amid challenges.

"First, we should focus on values that unite

us as a human family, not those which divide us.

"Ethics, sincerity and integrity in dealings with partners in bilateral and multilateral situations should be paramount," he said.

Secondly, Anwar said, while competition is good, there are times when cooperation is even better.

"While geoeconomic competition in the past was focused on commodities and resources, the current race is about cutting-edge technology - as demonstrated, for example, in the competition in the semiconductor industry," he said, adding that the rivalry to be ahead in this can take either a productive or a destructive turn.

He said Asia also needs to establish certain guardrails to ensure competition did not lead to a bifurcation in the technological world as this will only raise costs and impede further progress.

Technological competition, he said, should also be one of the principal agenda items for discussion at the highest levels, similar to discourses on security and general economic matters.

"Thirdly, as we talk of uncertainties in relation among nations, geopolitical conflicts and economic rivalry, let us not forget the ordinary citizen with the burden of having to put food on the table and the tangible and pressing uncertainties faced," he said, adding that wages and the purchasing power of households have "dented considerably" due to Covid-19 and global inflation.

Earlier in the morning, Anwar held bilateral talks with his Singapore counterpart Lee Hsien Loong, who also addressed the BFA.

"May the close relationship between the two countries become stronger," Anwar posted on his Facebook page after the four-eyed meeting with Lee.

Anwar, who is on a four-day official visit to China, was accompanied by Transport Minister Anthony Loke, Local Government Development Minister Nga Kor Ming, and Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Zambry Abdul Kadir.

After his speech, he flew to Beijing to attend a breaking of fast event at the Malaysian Embassy with Malaysians living in China.

According to MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Wee Ka Siong, who was at the event, Anwar gave a speech and fielded questions from the crowd of about 300 guests.