

## ASEAN SUMMIT AND RELATED SUMMITS

# 'ASEAN CAN SPUR SUPERPOWER TALKS'

**Bloc's platforms can encourage rival powers to seek dialogue and cooperation, says PM**

JAKARTA

**I**T is an opportune time for Asean to use its platforms to bring together rival world superpowers to encourage dialogue and cooperation, which continue to be the foundation of the 11-member regional bloc.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim who said this at the annual Asean Summit and Related Summits, known as the "Asean Plus platforms", added that it could lead the way for amicable solutions to pressing issues.

Anwar said the Asean way of dialogue and maintaining unity amidst differing opinions was attracting even more non-member countries to be party to Asean's treaties.

"This has attracted many countries to establish relations with Asean, including major powers, whose rivalries are being played out right at the centre of and adjacent to our region.

"The competition among them is impacting the implementation of cooperative initiatives under Asean-led mechanisms, such as



**AHMAD FAIRUZ OTHMAN**

the East Asia Summit and Asean Regional Forum.

"Asean has a unique opportunity, through its plus platforms, to bring together competing parties to remind them of the need to prioritise dialogue and cooperation, promote healthy competition and ensure what they bring into their relations with Asean will help maintain peace, stability and prosperity in the region," Anwar said at the plenary session at the 43rd Asean Summit and Related Summits here yesterday.

In this regard, he said, Asean must protect itself against divisive actions from major powers by upholding the concept and practice of Asean centrality.

He said Asean needed to strengthen its institutional capacities, streamline its mechanisms and ensure timely implementation of its decisions.

"We must not allow all that has been achieved to be undermined by the unbridled rivalry of major powers."

Anwar reiterated that recent issues, such as China's 2023 edition

of its Standard Map, which raised eyebrows among critics, must be resolved peacefully and rationally based on the law.

"Issues in the South China Sea must be managed in a peaceful and rational way through dialogue and consultation in accordance with the universally recognised principle of international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas 1982."

On Aug 28, China's Natural Resources Ministry released its 2023 China Standard Map, which included a significant portion of Malaysian waters near Sabah and Sarawak, as well as various regions in India being claimed by China.

Malaysia's Foreign Ministry said on Aug 31 that it would send a formal protest note to China regarding the delineation of the South China Sea according to the map China had released.

On a separate issue, Anwar said over the years, Asean members had remained united despite the differences some of them had expressed, and this had not gone unnoticed by Asean's critics.

"When Asean was formed, sceptics saw our differences and diversity as liabilities.

"However, diversity has proved to be Asean's strength."

*Page 1 pic: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim (second from right) with other Asean leaders in Jakarta yesterday in a show of solidarity.*