

'BOLD ASEAN STAND ON MYANMAR VITAL'

Malaysia housing 200,000 refugees from Myanmar, mainly Rohingya, says Anwar

JAKARTA

ASEAN must be bold when supporting the bloc's position on the Myanmar crisis, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said.

"Asean countries have to be more forthcoming and bold in terms of their position. Malaysia has to accommodate more than 200,000 refugees from Myanmar, mainly Rohingya.

"And, of course, Malaysians, including Muslims, feel disgusted by the atrocities inflicted on minorities in Myanmar.

"We therefore have to take a clear, bold position in support of

our Asean position to strongly urge Myanmar to accommodate (in this matter)."

He said this during an interview with *The Jakarta Post* in conjunction with the 43rd Asean Summit and Related Summits.

Anwar said Indonesia, in its role as Asean chairman this year, had taken steps to resolve the crisis in Myanmar and to maintain engagement with stakeholders in that country.

However, he said, a lack of cooperation from the military junta and its disregard of Asean's Five-Point Consensus on the Myanmar issue proved to be stumbling blocks to achieve stability in the country.

"For probably for the first time in Asean, we have held, I think, close to 100 meetings at the official level (on Myanmar). This initiative taken by Indonesia is supported by Asean countries to try and engage (with stakeholders in Myanmar). Unfortunately, the military junta has not been too forthcoming.

"Malaysia has taken a tough po-

sition (on Myanmar) based on the Five-Point Consensus and allowed for this engagement to continue. "There has not been much progress, but Asean has at least taken moves to engage with all parties. And we will have to continue to do so."

He reiterated his stance that implementation of the Five-Point Consensus in Myanmar was not what Asean members and Malaysia hoped it would be.

He said Malaysia supported any proposal by Asean, including the setting up of troika mechanism, to handle the Myanmar issue, although he felt that consensus among member states was the most effective method to handle it.

"Indonesia has done its part with very bold measures, but then it would also require a response on the part of the junta."

Anwar said: "So for now, whether it's a troika or other engagements on an informal level by neighbouring countries, they have got to be explored."

When commenting on China's

release of its mapping of its territories that included Asean states such as Malaysia, he said the regional bloc remained determined in protecting its sovereignty.

"It is a questionable issue, whether it's a new map or an old map. The map has been there and we have expressed our view.

We disagree with it. We consider our part of the boundary as our sovereignty.

"We've expressed our views and I think some countries in Asean have also expressed their views, either similar, sometimes stronger, sometimes less so. But we all have to continue to engage with China."

He said nations should never stop from engaging in negotiations on complex and multilateral issues, which may sometimes take decades to resolve.

"That is still a better option than an armed or military conflict.

"So as long as countries are prepared to continue to engage and negotiate, that is the best option.

Although it is not necessarily conclusive."

On another issue, he said Malaysia had given its input in the drafting the Asean Concord IV, which will serve as the foundation for the development of the Asean Community Vision 2045 and strengthen Asean to address challenges.

"We have reaffirmed the position of ensuring there is freedom, which is also the view of the pioneers of Asean; to resolve issues in Asean; to avoid (being) influenced by outside forces; but now (also) to refocus on urgent issues, like climate change, digital transformation; and increasing or enhancing trade and investments between Asean countries."

He said Asean members had reached a consensus to strengthen the Asean vision, which is the bloc's aspiration to forge a more cohesive Asean with a clearer direction and to streamline initiatives in diplomatic, security, trade and investment matters.