

'Uphold the idea of Asean centrality at all times' PM: M'sia takes crisis seriously

JAKARTA: The concept of Asean centrality must constantly be upheld, with its members guarding themselves against the divisive actions of major superpowers, says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

He said Asean had been recognised by others outside the region as one of the most successful regional organisations, particularly with regard to its ability to maintain a peaceful, stable, secure and prosperous region.

"We need to strengthen our institutional capacities, streamline our mechanisms and ensure timely implementation of our decisions.

"We must not allow all that has been achieved to be undermined by the unbridled rivalry of major powers," he said in Malaysia's intervention at the plenary session of the 43rd Asean Summit and Related Summits here yesterday.

His remarks come amid heightened tensions in the South China Sea after China released a map laying claims over large swathes disputed by some Asean members, triggering protests, including from Malaysia.

Anwar said Asean's success had attracted many to establish relations with Asean, including superpowers "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 the East Asia Summit and Asean Regional Forum," he added.

He said this would be a unique opportunity to bring together competing parties and remind them of the need to prioritise dialogue and cooperation.

This, he said, was to promote healthy competition and ensure the value that they bring to their

relations with Asean.

Anwar pointed out that Malaysia had issued its statement to make its position on the "2023 edition of the standard map of China" clear.

"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 UN Convention on the Law of the Seas 1982," he said.

On Aug 30, Wisma Putra said Malaysia does not recognise China's 2023 standard map, which outlines portions of Malaysian waters near Sabah and Sarawak as belonging to China.

Earlier, Indonesian President Joko Widodo, who is also known as Jokowi, noted in his opening remarks that Asean had agreed not to become a proxy for any power.

He dismissed doubts over Asean's unity, saying that it remained intact and strong.

"As a family member and chair of Asean, I would like to stress that Asean remains united to this day. But 'unity' does not mean that there are no disagreements," said Jokowi.

Nine South-East Asian leaders, including the new Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet and the Prime Minister of prospective member Timor-Leste, Xanana Gusmao, were present.

The new Thai Prime Minister, Srettha Thavisin, was absent. He was represented by Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs Sarun Charoensuwan instead.

Myanmar's generals have not been invited to attend any of the high-level Asean meetings as they have failed to make concrete progress on a peace plan to end their crisis. The country did not send a non-political representative.

JAKARTA: Malaysia does not view the Myanmar crisis lightly as it is causing difficulties for both sides, says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

He voiced disappointment over the slow progress on the issue despite the fact that Indonesia, the chair of Asean, had taken enormous and unprecedented steps to address the situation.

"For now, I don't see an immediate resolution to the conflict. We can't take it lightly as there have been atrocities, although I accept that they are not necessarily inflicted only by the military junta side, but they are largely responsible for them. As I have said earlier and will reiterate, Malaysia cannot view this as something usual. It has caused so much difficulty and hardship for our country," he said.