

Asean contemplates China

Anwar: Future cooperation hinges on multilateral relations

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JAKARTA: Calls for mutual trust, strengthened stability and continuous engagement with China continue to dominate discussions on the second day of the 43rd Asean Summit.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said future collaboration between Asean and China will depend largely on multilateral relations.

Anwar stressed that Malaysia and its Asean partners consider China an important neighbour and a great friend in terms of trade, investment and security arrangements.

"I would certainly stress that future collaborations would depend largely on the issue of trust and discussions at the multilateral level, in terms of security and protecting the interests of both China and Asean," he said during Malaysia's intervention at the 26th Asean-China Summit held in conjunction with the 43rd Asean Summit and other related summits here yesterday.

The summit at the Jakarta Convention Centre (JCC) began with Anwar participating in the 26th Asean-China Summit, attended by Asean leaders and the Chinese Premier, Li Qiang.

Anwar said China and Asean should also continue to maintain multilateral dialogue platforms in areas of security, as the region's stability is of utmost importance.

Anwar also noted that the Chinese Premier's presence at the summit strengthened the camaraderie between all stakeholders.

Just before this week's summits, China released a map with a "10-dash line" showing what appeared to be an expansion of the area it considers its territory in the South China Sea.

Southeast Asian countries, including Malaysia, the



Talking things out: Anwar shaking hands with Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau during a bilateral meet on the sidelines of the 43rd Asean Summit in Jakarta, Indonesia. - AP

Philippines and Vietnam, protested China's new map, while the latter told all parties to refrain from "over-interpreting" the map, even as the Asean bloc is keen to reach an agreement on a long-discussed code of conduct for the waterway in the South China Sea.

Anwar said that Malaysia has conveyed to China of the country's unwavering stance in terms of protecting its sovereignty.

"As I alluded to earlier, Mr Premier, we have taken a very strong independent stance as far as protecting our country and the interests of our region," he said.

The Prime Minister added that Malaysia was looking to enhance the relationship between the two nations, and such cooperation should begin with the third version of the Asean-China Free Trade Agreement.

"I also shared, in a small way, our Madani Economic Framework, but the relations with China, whether enhanced further, would relate to our dependence on issues relating to food security and digital information," said Anwar.

"Under China's leadership, innovation, technology and technical education have transformed China, and this also benefitted us.

"This is not just about government-initiated programmes but also people-to-people interests since 2024 will be the year of China-Asean Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges," said Anwar.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo, earlier in his opening of the summit, had echoed the same message, saying that concrete Asean-China cooperation is need-

ed, which includes prioritising mutual trust.

This trip marks the Chinese premier's debut on the Asean stage and his first visit to an Asian country since assuming office in March.

Earlier, Li had said that it is important to avoid a "new Cold War" when dealing with conflicts between countries.

Li said countries needed to "appropriately handle differences and disputes".

"At present, it is very important to oppose taking sides, bloc confrontation and a new Cold War," Li told the meeting.