



Making the dream work

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim posing for a group photo with the Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese (sixth from left) and leaders of Asean nations at the Asean-Australia Special Summit at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Center. Albanese hosted the second Asean-Australia Special Summit on Australian soil to bring together the Asean leaders amid the backdrop of geopolitical shifts and tensions in the region. Anwar also took the opportunity to discuss boosting ties with Albanese.
— Bernama

Trade with Down Under goes up

Aussie business exchange mission set to help deepen ties with Malaysia

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MELBOURNE: Malaysia will be one of the first nations to receive Australia's first business exchange mission to South-East Asia next month.

Australian Trade and Tourism Minister Don Farrell voiced his excitement about the exchange mission which would head to Malaysia and Singapore for their "abundant trading opportunities in clean energy transition".

"Harnessing the full potential of our economic relationship is more than boosting trade.

"It's also about deepening Australia's investment in South-East Asia and accelerating investment from our Asean partners right here in Australia," he said in his keynote address during the CEO Forum, which was part of the programmes during the three-day Asean-Australia Special Summit here yesterday.

The summit marks the 50th anniversary since Australia became Asean's first dialogue partner in 1974.

Farrell noted that Australia's eco-

nomics future lies in South-East Asia and the country wants to deepen its trade with all Asean countries.

"As a bloc, Asean is on track to be the world's fourth biggest economy by 2040 and home to a consumer market 10 times bigger than Australia's.

"Our two-way trade hit a record of A\$178bil (RM547bil) in 2022. This is greater than our two-way trade with either Japan, the US or the European Union.

"If we can strengthen our economic relationships and achieve a growth of 6.3% year on year, our two-way trade could triple to over A\$530bil (RM1.62 trillion) by 2040," he said.

The growth is "well within reach" as Asean has enormous growth opportunities for Australian businesses and is also a key diversification market for exports, he said.

Despite being geographically close and experiencing significant growth, Farrell said South-East Asia only receives around 30% of Australia's total exports.

To enhance trade ties, he said Australia has allocated over A\$19mil (RM58mil) to support

Australian businesses' expansion in the region through the Australia-South-East Asia Business Exchange.

"This programme aims to establish long-term connections with customers, suppliers, investors and partners by sending top-notch agriculture, mining, education, infrastructure, technology and tourism businesses to South-East Asia."

By 2040, Farrell said South-East Asia will require A\$3 trillion (RM9.22 trillion) in infrastructure investment, providing excellent opportunities for investors.

Increased Australian investment will lead to greater participation in contracts, exports and value for Australian companies in transformative projects, he said.

"Starting later this year, around 100 Australian and South-East Asian professionals will participate in exchanges with support from the Australia Business Council," he said.

Asean secretary-general Dr Kao Kim Hourn, who was also present, said Asean and Australia have a strong economic relationship that is expected to further

strengthen in the coming years.

"In 2022, trade between the two saw a significant 23% increase compared to 2021.

"Foreign direct investments from Australia have steadily grown, reaching A\$2bil (RM6.15bil) in 2022, indicating post-pandemic economic recovery.

Kao said Asean offers vast opportunities with a market size of 671 million people, a growing middle class, and abundant resources.

"The focus should be on creating a favourable environment for investment and leveraging diverse policies and instruments."

He said key areas of collaboration include strengthening market integration, embracing the digital economy, fostering sustainability through low-carbon strategies, and offering investment prospects in renewable energy, infrastructure, and green technology.

Australia's special envoy to South-East Asia, Nicholas Moore AO, emphasised the importance of market awareness, sector understanding, and regional literacy to enhance Australia's two-way trade and investment with

the region and strengthen economic integration.

"While a lot has been done to remove trade barriers through free trade agreements, more can be done in areas such as standards and qualifications."

Moore, who developed "Invested: Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040" that was launched by Australian Prime Minister Nicholas Albanese last September, called for capacity-building initiatives to empower both Australia and the region to seize opportunities and address economic challenges.

He also highlighted the need for increased private sector involvement to contribute to these efforts in promoting growth and prosperity.

On Tuesday, Albanese announced an A\$2bil (RM6.15bil) South-East Asia Investment Financing Facility, aimed at bolstering investment in the region.

He said Australia would also extend business visitor visas from three to five years and provide a 10-year Frequent Traveller stream to eligible Asean member states and Timor-Leste.