



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim meeting Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin (third from right) on the sidelines of the Nikkei Forum 29th Future of Asia in Tokyo on Thursday. BERNAMA PIC

DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION

PM SETS TONE FOR ASEAN CHAIRMANSHIP

Anwar maintains Malaysia will remain 'fiercely neutral' amid US-China tensions



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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim capped his short but fruitful work visit to Japan with news that RM1.9 billion in potential investments and exports were secured from the country. But the bigger story from the Land of the Rising Sun were the "investments" he made in the time spent engaging with government and business leaders, students and the international media fraternity. In almost every engagement, he set the tone for what Asean will look like under Malaysia's chairmanship next year. From his keynote address at the Nikkei Forum 29th Future of Asia

to a media session with the international press, Anwar stressed the importance of dialogue and cooperation to ensure peace, stability and prosperity.

During his session at the Nikkei Forum, he said Malaysia would remain "fiercely neutral" amid tensions between the United States and China.

When asked hard questions on Beijing's expansionism in the South China Sea and the risk of escalating conflicts, he acknowledged there were issues, but they were not a stumbling block to strong bilateral relations and economic opportunities.

Even when pressed about his meeting with Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, he did not shy away from calling him a friend.

It was through this friendship that he could appeal for Hamas to accept the recommendations of the Middle East countries and the international community to pursue peace, a two-state solution and an exchange of captives.

During Anwar's bilateral meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, collaboration and cooperation seemed to be the overarching theme.

He also managed to squeeze in discussions with Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin, as well as top leaders from Singapore, Indonesia, Cambodia and Mongolia who attended the Nikkei Forum.

On Asean, he said the bloc must focus on reinforcing its economic strengths to maintain unity.

He also called for Asean to be more "aggressive and dynamic" to remain a cohesive force, which is important given the civil war in Myanmar which killed over 1,000 people since last year and displaced many more.

He acknowledged the crisis and challenged Asean's non-interference policy, but said he would push for greater dialogue with Myanmar.

In one of his final events in Tokyo, he paid tribute to scholar Toshihiko Izutsu, who translated the Quran to Japanese.

In his speech, he spoke on the importance of empathy and interfaith dialogue in fostering peace and harmony within Asean, which is among the most diverse regions in the world.

Meanwhile, Investment, Trade and Industry Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz said Malaysia's trade with Japan was expected to increase this year, bolstered by investments in the semiconductor and renewable energy sectors.

"Last year, trade with Japan stood at around RM35 billion. One-third of this involves liquefied natural gas."

Japan has been Malaysia's fourth largest trading partner for nine consecutive years.

During Anwar's working visit to Japan from May 22 to 24, Malaysia secured RM1.45 billion in potential investments and RM550 million in potential exports from meetings with Japanese companies.