

44TH AND 45TH ASEAN SUMMITS AND RELATED SUMMITS

Asean, Beijing agree to avoid conflict, says Anwar

VIENTIANE: Asean and Beijing have reached an agreement to avoid disputes in the South China Sea, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

He said China and all the member countries of the regional bloc had also agreed to use diplomatic channels and negotiations to resolve disputes in those waters during the 44th and 45th Asean Summits and Related Summits held here.

"I suggested, if possible, to use Asean channels, for example. Of course, some developments in the Philippines are concerning, and we have conveyed that.

"There is assurance from Chinese Premier Li Qiang that this matter will be handled peacefully in line with the spirit of the

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982," he told Malaysian media on the final day of the summit yesterday.

Disputes in the South China Sea were among the key issues discussed by the 10 Asean countries and their dialogue partner, China, during the summit — with emphasis placed on the right to defend their respective national sovereignty.

Malaysia had earlier reaffirmed its stance that the diplomatic approach and cooperation through Asean are the best means to address the South China Sea dispute.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan said while China claimed a significant portion

of the South China Sea, Malaysia upholds its maritime rights based on international law.

"We also adhere to international law, just as China does.

"However, what is essential is that we always utilise diplomatic channels and do not shut the doors to discussions," he told Malaysian reporters late on Thursday night.

Mohamad also urged the involved nations not to take steps that would hinder communication and instead sit down together to negotiate.

"We call on all parties not to 'slam the door', but to come together to seek the best solution.

"An Asean-led approach is more suitable as there are several littoral nations, such as

Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Cambodia, each with their respective claims."

Mohamad further asserted that Malaysia was in a strong position as it has long registered its maritime boundary map in accordance with UNCLOS 1982.

"International law clearly defines maritime limits, including baselines, forward lines and exclusive economic zones extending more than 300km."

He also emphasised the importance of safeguarding the South China Sea Trade Route, which is one of the busiest trade routes in the world.

He said any crisis in this region would have severe repercussions on global trade. **Berna-**
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