

Anwar to set the stage and raise issues at Asean gathering

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is set to raise issues concerning regional stability and economic partnership during the 44th and 45th Asean Summits and Related Summits here from tomorrow to Friday, when world leaders descend on the Laotian capital.

As the chair of Asean this year, Laos has set the tagline of the summit as "Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience", which is in line with its goal of transforming the landlocked nation into a centre of regional integration.

Anwar is set to touch on matters concerning digitalisation, artificial intelligence, new technologies, climate change, transnational crime and territorial disputes in the summits that will take place this week in this capital city noted for its French colonial architecture and religious buildings.

This year's summits will see the participation of China, South Korea, Japan, Australia, India, Canada and the United States in various dialogues discussing topics ranging from bilateral trade

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negotiations to climate change agreements, regional security and humanitarian issues.

Malaysia's Ambassador to Laos Edi Irwan Mahmud said the South China Sea issue is a complex and sensitive one, but Malaysia has been consistent with its stance.

"Malaysia is committed to resolving issues like the one involving the South China Sea by using the appropriate diplomatic channels, including Asean meetings.

"This applies to the ongoing conflict in Myanmar and the Five-Point Consensus," he said.

Unveiled in April 2021, the Five-Point Consensus is a peace effort by Asean on Myanmar.

Currently, the Myanmar junta has refused to engage in talks

with its rivals, accusing them of being terrorists.

Edi Irwan said the Five-Point Consensus will remain as Asean's main reference in tackling the ongoing crisis in the country.

"Asean will continue its efforts to facilitate peace talks in Myanmar based on consensus and this summit is expected to discuss challenges in implementing the plan," he added.

He also said that Anwar will be accompanied by Foreign Minister

Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan, Investment, Trade and Industry Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz, as well as high-level officers from the Tourism, Arts and Culture; Economy; and Youth and Sports ministries.

The Prime Minister is expected to arrive here today before attending the summits and related summits alongside other leaders from tomorrow.

At the closing ceremony of the 44th and 45th Asean Summits on Friday, the outgoing host will hand over the Asean chairmanship to Malaysia.

Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute chief executive officer Danial Rahman said Malaysia is expected to emphasise the importance of expanding Asean's cooperation with larger multilateral pacts such as BRICS and also speak on the ongoing conflict in Myanmar.

BRICS is an intergovernmental grouping comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia and the United Arab Emirates.

"Malaysia is likely to advocate for more concrete actions while still respecting Asean's principle of non-interference," said Danial.

He added that disputes over the South China Sea issue will be a priority for Malaysia.

Asean members Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei are contesting China's claim of sovereignty over the South China Sea - a crucial waterway for shipping.

"The South China Sea, which sees nearly US\$5 trillion (RM21.4 trillion) in trade annually, remains a flashpoint.

"Malaysia's stance, along with other Asean nations, is to ensure that this vital waterway remains peaceful and open, while also navigating complex relations with China.

"Malaysia is also likely to voice concerns on broader global tensions, such as the ongoing genocide in Gaza and the escalating Middle East conflict," said Danial.

As Malaysia prepares to assume the Asean chairmanship next year, Danial said the country is likely to use these summits to start laying its foundation.

"Malaysia will want to position itself as a leader in Asean's efforts towards sustainable development, economic resilience and transformation.

"By showcasing its commitment in these areas, Malaysia is setting the tone for its upcoming chairmanship," he added.

Some 2,000 delegates and 1,000 journalists from Laos and other countries are expected to attend over 20 meetings during the three-day gathering here.