

## GLOBAL UNCERTAINTY

# 'FOCUS ON DOMESTIC STRENGTH'

We can manage matters within our own country and intra-Asean issues, says Anwar

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**M**ALAYSIA and Asean countries must focus on strengthening internal and domestic capacities to face global economic uncertainties.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said issues such as the United States tariffs, the economic conflict between the US and China and the war between Russia and Ukraine were beyond Asean's control.

He said while Asean could voice its concerns, the bloc was in no position to resolve these issues.

"However, managing matters within our own country and intra-Asean issues is within our capability, so we must focus on what we can handle.

"We can speak of grand ideas, but we must also be pragmatic in addressing them," he said during the Finance Ministry's monthly assembly yesterday.

He said when Asean was established, the founding leaders wanted to ensure regional peace and to avoid being drawn into the Cold War.

He said Asean was focused on the principle of centrality and maintaining good relations with all countries while safeguarding the interests of individual nations and the region as a whole.

He said Asean must continue to prioritise enhancing economic

cooperation, which can attract foreign investment.

"What is seen as a gap or weakness is that we have yet to advance a stronger economic cooperation agenda. However, there have been initial steps and collaborations.

"We have begun implementing solutions, such as the use of local currencies, referred to in the Chiang Mai Initiative, covering about 20 per cent of trade transactions with Indonesia, Thailand and other countries.

"These are all early successes, but the potential for trade between these countries is vast. For example, between Malaysia and Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia, and the Philippines and Thailand.

"So this is the area we are now emphasising, which are new methods and instruments that can help (the economic sector)."

Anwar said as Asean chair, Malaysia would hold a meeting with Myanmar's Senior General Min Aung Hlaing in Thailand this week to discuss humanitarian efforts following the earthquake in the country.

He said the meeting would facilitate assistance, including medical aid.

He said the meeting would take place in Bangkok after he met Asean Informal Committee adviser Thaksin Shinawatra and Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra to address the Sungai Golok-Rantau Panjang issue, specifically the flooding in southern Thailand and Kelantan.

"While the Five-Point Consensus remains a prerequisite for Asean-Myanmar cooperation, this meeting is intended to facilitate humanitarian aid in light of the severe earthquake disaster they are currently facing."

He said the cabinet had agreed



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim speaking at the Finance Ministry's monthly assembly in Putrajaya yesterday. NSTP PIC BY MOHD FADLI HAMZAH

to continue supporting the military field hospital in Myanmar.

Min Aung Hlaing has been barred from attending Asean summits due to the Myanmar military's failure to fulfil the bloc's agreed peace plan.

Anwar said Myanmar's willingness to engage reflected its recognition of the friendship with Malaysia and a positive reception to Malaysia's outreach.

He said he would propose during the meeting that the ceasefire in Myanmar be extended and that attacks on groups considered political opponents be halted.

"Although April 17 is a major religious holiday in Myanmar, he (Min Aung Hlaing) will still travel to Bangkok to meet me and return immediately afterwards.

"I called and said we wanted to

help because we are neighbour and part of Asean, too. I asked that military activities be halted as the people were suffering, so let's stop it for now and implement a ceasefire.

"Two days later, the ceasefire was put in place. It may not necessarily have been due to my proposal but at the very least, I was able to raise the matter on behalf of myself and Asean. I will ask for it to be extended, especially as we will send a team and we want to ensure their safety."

On criticism of Malaysia's assistance to Myanmar, he said neighbouring countries would be burdened if the issue was not addressed.

"If the problem is not solved 200,000 Rohingyas may come to Malaysia."