Firm grip: Anwar shaking hands with ministry staff during the Finance Ministry's monthly assembly in Putrajaya. —AZHAR MAHFOF/ The Star

Buying time for post-quake aid

M'sia to seek Myanmar ceasefire extension

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PUTRAJAYA: Malaysia, as Asean Chair, will seek an extension to the ceasefire announced by Myanmar's ruling military to allow ongoing humanitarian aid in the earthquake-hit nation, says Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

As Asean Chair, the Prime Minister said Malaysia will make this appeal when he meets Myanmar Prime Minister Senior Gen Min Aung Hlaing in Bangkok this Friday.

"The temporary ceasefire will end on April 22 and I will ask for it to be extended," he said when addressing the Finance Ministry's monthly assembly.

Anwar said the meeting will be held on the sidelines of his visit to Bangkok, where he will meet his Thai counterpart Paetongtarn Shinawatra to resolve the issue of floods in Sungai Golok, among others.

"I will leave for Bangkok after meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

"We will be discussing matters related to Sungai Golok. The dredging and cleaning of Sungai Golok is necessary, as it also contributes to flooding in southern Thailand and Kelantan," he said.

On April 2, Myanmar's ruling military declared a temporary ceasefire in the country's civil war to allow relief efforts following a 7.7-magnitude earthquake which killed thousands.

Malaysia had sent its SMART rescue team as well as set up a temporary military field hospital to assist in humanitarian aid there.

Although there are no diplomatic ties between Asean and Myanmar's current ruling military junta, Anwar said this will be the first time such a meeting is being held based on humanitarian grounds.

"While Asean remains committed to the five-point consensus as the basis for engagement with Myanmar, this meeting is being held purely on humanitarian grounds.

"The recent earthquake in Myanmar was severe and the Cabinet has agreed to continue Malaysia's assistance, including via a temporary field hospital run by the Malaysian Armed Forces," he said.

On US tariffs, the Prime Minister reiterated the need for Asean to have one voice and a common approach, adding that it was crucial for the grouping to focus internally and work collectively on the matter.

"Investment, Trade and Industry Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Abdul Aziz had recently invited his Asean counterparts for a meeting to explore ways to maintain bilateral ties with the US.

'This allowed us space so that we can have a common approach in facing the challenges," he said.

Anwar pointed out that Asean represents the voice of not just one of the world's largest economy but also one of the most peaceful regions in the world.

"We also have some of the fastest-growing economies in the world. With these two strengths, no global power can view Asean lightly or sideline it," he said.