

# Asean must form united stance on tariffs: Anwar

**PUTRAJAYA:** Malaysia and other Asean countries must come together to form a united stance on the tariffs recently announced by the US to ensure upcoming negotiations rest on a solid foundation, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

He noted that although the announcement by US President Donald Trump was made on questionable grounds, Asean should not take the matter lightly, especially amid a volatile global economic and political climate.

"Yesterday, I elaborated at length on the decision made by the special committee handling the US tariffs, which was attended by the entire Cabinet.

"We cannot take this lightly. It is quite unusual as the country that once championed free trade and helped establish the World Trade Organisation and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade - wealthy nations such as the US - is now taking a different approach.

"This is what I mean by 'post-normal times',

when political and economic policies are implemented unexpectedly, including tariff decisions based on very weak grounds," he said during a staff meeting at the Prime Minister's Department yesterday.

Deputy prime ministers Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi and Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof were also present.

Anwar described the method used by the US administration to determine the tariffs as flawed, noting that some remote islands were included, "even though they are only inhabited by penguins".

Nevertheless, he said the Malaysian government has opted for a moderate approach as there is still room for discussion and negotiation, and certain exceptions must be identified in detail.

"My task, along with the Foreign Ministry and relevant ministers, is to contact our friends in Asean so each country can state its position - but at the same time, we move forward as a collective.

"We must stand firm together as Asean with a population of 640 million and an economic strength among the top globally. This region is also considered one of the safest and fastest-growing in the world," he said.

Anwar added that he had the opportunity to discuss the matter with Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto during a Hari Raya Aidilfitri gathering, where they also touched on issues concerning Gaza and Myanmar.

"I also had a lengthy discussion with the Vietnamese prime minister and, before that, contacted the leaders of the Philippines, Brunei, Laos and Thailand to coordinate our positions.

"With this approach, we want Asean to present a unified front - demonstrating agreement and building a stronger foundation for future negotiations," he said.

On April 2, Trump announced a series of new tariffs targeting several Asean nations, significantly raising import duties on key Southeast Asian trading partners. - Bernama