

Embracing dependence on one another vital for Asian nations: PM

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim urged Asian nations to embrace a new approach of "sovereign interdependence" to withstand global economic turbulence, technological disruption and the weaponisation of trade.

He said the model recognises interdependence as unavoidable, and stressed that it must be built on resilience, mutual respect and national choice while rejecting both forced dependence and enforced decoupling.

Speaking at the Kuala Lumpur Roundtable on Asia-Pacific Regional Cooperation of the Boao Forum for Asia, Anwar warned that the global trading order was breaking down, with major economies now acting as disruptors.

"The global trading system is in distress. The World Trade Organisation has been left in near-paralysis.

"Tariffs swing wildly, export controls are imposed and lifted without warning, and financial sanctions reach far beyond their targets.

"What was once a web of mutual gain is now a network of vulnerabilities."

He cautioned that instead of fostering cooperation, critical systems such as energy pipelines, shipping routes, semiconductors, payment networks and capital flows are increasingly being used as tools of leverage.

Anwar said history shows that prosperity declines when nations build barriers.

He said Asia's rise as a centre of growth could only be sustained through stronger regional cohesion, coordinated policies and shared resilience.

"Asean offers a model, as one of the few groupings where rivals sit together in dialogue.

"As this year's Asean chair, Malaysia is determined to preserve that centrality, not as rhetoric but as practice."

He highlighted the recent conclusion of negotiations on the Asean-China Free Trade Area 3.0, which would be presented to leaders in October.

He said the upgraded agreement now covers digital economy, green growth, supply-chain connectivity, technical standards and SME support.

Anwar called for the revitalisation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the world's largest free-trade pact covering 30% of global GDP.

He said Malaysia intends to convene an RCEP Summit in October to accelerate implementation. - By **Harith Kamal**