

PM: ASEAN MUST SHAPE REGION'S FUTURE

Diversification of supply chain, energy security and digital economy are 3 critical challenges

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ASEAN must shape the region's future, rather than just reacting to global shifts, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

He said the grouping's success depended on its ability to integrate new technologies, develop robust economic frameworks, and secure a more equitable and sustainable future for all.

"Malaysia stands at the heart of this transformation. We are not mere bystanders in the shifting tides of geopolitics and economics.

"We are active participants, working with our partners to build a future that is resilient, innovative and just," he said in his keynote address at the China Conference: Southeast Asia held at a hotel here yesterday.

Anwar said Asean's economic resilience would depend on its ability to navigate three critical challenges: supply chain diversification, energy security and the digital economy.

He said Asean must position itself as a reliable hub for global trade and investment, reducing vulnerabilities to external shocks.

Strengthening the region's industrial base through investments in advanced manufacturing, semiconductors and green technologies would be essential in this effort, he said.

"Supply chain disruptions remain a major concern. Asean must focus on reducing its dependence on external factors and enhancing its capacity to withstand global economic shifts," he added.

On energy security, Anwar stressed the importance of the Asean Energy Grid and investments in renewable energy to ensure long-term, climate-conscious economic growth.

He referred to Malaysia's target



The logo of Malaysia's Asean chairmanship this year at the Langkawi International Convention Centre last month. Asean must diversify its relationships to boost economic resilience, says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.
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of having 70 per cent of its energy from renewable sources by 2050 as a benchmark for Asean's broader sustainability efforts.

"The transition to clean energy is no longer an option — it is a necessity.

"Asean must commit to sustainable economic policies that prioritise environmental responsibility," he said.

Anwar also highlighted the significance of the digital economy and artificial intelligence (AI) in Asean's future growth.

He said the Asean Digital Economy Framework Agreement must serve as a catalyst for regional transformation, with a focus on AI governance, cybersecurity, and digital inclusivity.

"To fully harness the benefits of technological advancements, Asean must establish common standards for data protection, facilitate seamless cross-border digital trade, and invest in capacity-building initiatives to bridge the digital divide," he said.

Anwar also acknowledged China as Asean's most significant economic partner, saying that the relationship would continue to be a cornerstone of regional stability.

However, as global economic dynamics evolve, Asean's engagement with China must adapt to new challenges and opportunities, he said.

"This means we must move beyond traditional trade and investment figures and focus on a partnership that is transformational and future-oriented," he added.

Anwar said there was a need for Asean to expand its global engagement beyond traditional partners, strengthening ties with

China, the Gulf Cooperation Council, BRICS, and other emerging economies.

"Strengthening these relationships is not about choosing sides, but about ensuring Asean's strategic relevance in a multipolar world.

"By diversifying partnerships, Asean can enhance its economic resilience, tap into new investment opportunities, and play a more proactive role in shaping global governance frameworks," he said.

He also reaffirmed Malaysia's non-aligned stance, rejecting economic coercion and unilateral actions that undermined regional stability, while advocating for a rules-based multilateral system that ensured fairness, transparency and representation, particularly for the Global South.

Anwar also urged Asean to act with urgency, unity and ambition to secure a prosperous future, warning that incremental progress and short-term thinking would not be enough.

"Asean's moment is now. This is the time for bold decisions, strong partnerships, and a long-term commitment to prosperity," he said.

Anwar reaffirmed Malaysia's readiness to lead Asean but stressed that leadership was a shared responsibility.

"Businesses, academics, entrepreneurs, and civil society must all contribute to building an inclusive, sustainable, and resilient future.

"As Malaysia strengthens its role in Asean and deepens ties with China, I urge everyone to be part of this vision.

"Let's build a future based on trust, innovation, and shared aspirations."