

'Strengthen supply chains'

PM calls for tougher trade networks amid global shifts

HANOI: Asean must build a robust and resilient supply chain ecosystem within the region to withstand looming geostrategic challenges, such as the recent tariffs imposed by the United States and the counter-tariffs by those on the receiving end, says Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Calling it an era of rivalry and division, the Prime Minister said the 10-member bloc must adopt a new model of trade integration that aligns with global trends toward environmental sustainability.

"While some may argue that Asean can benefit as global supply chains recalibrate and seek diversification, the reality is far more complex.

"The question remains: Can Asean truly capitalise on these shifts, or will we be caught in the crossfire of great power rivalry?

"In either case, we must ensure that any gains from investment and trade be distributed equita-

bly among our member states and not exacerbate existing disparities," he said in his keynote address at the Asean Future Forum 2025.

Malaysia is the Asean Chair for 2025.

Anwar pointed out the region's stark economic development gap, citing the fact that some members' GDP per capita is more than 34 times higher than others.

"This is a challenge that must be jointly addressed. We must commit to ensuring that no nation within Asean is left behind in the pursuit of economic growth."

The Prime Minister said markets in developed nations are increasingly prioritising sustainability and that the regional group-

ing must adapt to such trends to maintain its relevance in global trade.

"This calls for measuring, reporting and verifying the environmental footprint of products that cross our borders.

"Such initiatives will not only enhance our trade competitiveness but also encourage greater private sector investment in green economy transformations," he added, reported Bernama.

Anwar also said that Asean remains cautious about becoming overly reliant on any one market or industry, which could make the region vulnerable to external shocks.

The Prime Minister also spoke on Asean centrality, describing it as a privilege that the 10-member countries must constantly earn and maintain in a world characterised by shifting geopolitical dynamics and diverse national interests.

"We often hear calls for Asean

to strengthen and reinforce its centrality to continue exercising its agency and strategic autonomy.

"However, we must always bear in mind that centrality is not a right but a privilege that has to be earned and re-earned in the context of changing contingencies.

"Asean's centrality counts for little when there is no cohesion among member states, or when we let internal differences and priorities divide us," he said.

Describing Asean as fortunate to be a region that is the most peaceful and the fastest-growing economy in the world, the Prime Minister said the grouping must be a beacon of hope, fostering a sustainable, harmonious and economically dynamic region.

He said Malaysia's approach to prosperity is to emphasise sustainability and equitable economic development as the main pillars of shared cooperation.