

Anwar to Europe: Meet Asean as equals

THE STAR 05 JUL 2025

pg. 2
for balance."

PARIS: Trade should be a bridge and not a barrier, and it is time for South-East Asia and Europe to redefine their ties as equals, as co-creators, and as partners, says Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

The Prime Minister said trade allows the exchange of goods, services, and ideas, but it should not be about exporting one society's preferences as universal truths, he said.

"Rules and standards do not descend from the heavens. They are shaped by experience, context, and national choices," he said during his lecture, "South-East Asia and Europe", which he delivered at the Sorbonne University here yesterday.

"We fully respect Europe's right to regulate in ways that reflect its values. But when those regulations shut others out, even unintentionally, we must speak openly about the consequences," he said.

"Let us be clear, we do not ask for indulgence. We ask only that Europe meet us where we are, not where its models presume we ought to be.

"What we seek is not favouritism but fairness. Not exemption, but equity."

He said if both Europe and

"We ask only that Europe meet us where we are, not where its models presume we ought to be. What we seek is not favouritism but fairness."

Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim

Asean were to conclude agreements of ambition and substance, they must be grounded not only in economic logic but also in mutual comprehension.

He said South-East Asia's advancement can be seen from Asean's growth trajectory, which resulted from the regional bloc's economic integration.

This has promoted intra-regional trade and investment and enhanced the economic resilience and competitiveness of member countries, he added.

The economic transformation demonstrated by such rapid growth and development has made Asean the world's fifth-largest economic bloc, and it is now moving to the fourth spot.

"South-East Asian countries have undergone 'democratic

metamorphosis', moving from authoritarian regimes to more participatory governance with democratic accountability, in some instances, even 'more democratic' than some of the established systems.

Asean's focus on regional diplomacy and cooperation is a hallmark of its centrality and progressive multilateralism.

"Barring the crisis in Myanmar, this has yielded momentous progress in helping to address interstate tensions, manage conflicts, and promote collective decision-making in regional crises," he said.

"In that spirit, it is time for South-East Asia and Europe to redefine the terms of our engagement – as equals, as co-creators, as partners in a world yearning

"As this year's Asean Chair, I come to Paris as a South-East Asian voice – seeking to deepen the conversation between our region and this continent," he said, adding that his meetings with the French and Italian leaders during his visit are to expand, enhance and fortify ties.

He said Asean welcomes Europe's engagement and the deepening of its presence in the region, but the terms of that partnership must be grounded in mutual respect and understanding, not hierarchy.

He said if Europe is to be a trusted and enduring presence in Asia, it must engage with the region as it truly is, which is through its complexity, dynamism and self-awareness.

"A stable peace in our region is maintained by a careful balance of diplomacy, credible security arrangements, and principled engagement.

"We urge Europe to resist the impulse to universalise its predicaments and predilections, big or small.

"Strategic clarity is just as essential in Asia as it is in Europe. But it must begin with a recognition of difference," he said.