

The art of effective intervention

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Malaysia's diplomacy and leadership show what's possible for peace

By WONG CHUN WAI

KUALA LUMPUR: Let's give Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim the credit where it is due.

For a while, many were left wondering how he was going to bring together two angry Asean member countries that were locked in a deadly conflict.

It didn't help that at one point, a Thai Foreign Ministry official was quoted as saying that it did not need a third country to get involved.

The spokesperson, Nikorndej Balakura, reportedly stated that Thailand prefers bilateral negotiations.

But the Malaysian Prime Minister quietly and swiftly went behind the scenes to orchestrate a landmark ceasefire.

It was complex, more so when it involved unresolved historical tensions, but certainly with the

hard work of our Foreign Ministry, Anwar pulled it off.

It is certainly a boost to his credentials as the Chair of Asean 2025. It would be awkward for him to talk about Asean unity if the two nations continue to fire rockets at each other.

The five-day border conflict – marked by artillery exchanges and mass civilian displacement – ended with an “immediate and unconditional” cessation of hostilities. It was a swift and effective intervention, the kind rarely seen in South-East Asian diplomacy.

Anwar's role as mediator has earned widespread praise, not only for de-escalating a dangerous flashpoint but also for revitalising Asean's credibility in managing intra-regional disputes.

For a regional bloc often criticised for its inertia, Malaysia's leadership in this instance marks a meaningful shift.

Critics have always dismissed Asean as a talk shop, but continuous talking to each other is surely better than going to war.

It would have badly tarnished his image if Anwar had failed to bring the two nations to the table.

What stands out is Anwar's ability to bring both sides to a ceasefire amid rising nationalist rhetoric and domestic political sensitivities in both Bangkok and Phnom Penh.

The participation of international observers from the United States and China further underscores the delicate balancing act Malaysia managed to perform.

In an era of intensifying superpower rivalry in South-East Asia, Malaysia's non-aligned posture proved an asset, not a liability.

Admittedly, economic reforms and domestic governance still dominate the national conversa-

tion, but this diplomatic victory may offer a needed boost to Anwar's leadership narrative.

It shows a Malaysia that is not merely reactive but also assertive and constructive on the global stage.

Of course, the road ahead is uncertain. A ceasefire is not a peace treaty. The underlying territorial and political disputes between Thailand and Cambodia remain unresolved.

A veteran Thai journalist texted me to warn against any celebrations until the frontiers are actually quiet.

The BBC reported that “shells and rockets continued to land in both countries even as the peace talks were underway; it will take a little longer to cool the emotions on both sides.”

Still, Malaysia's offer to facilitate ongoing dialogue – and potentially a peacekeeping frame-

work – positions Kuala Lumpur as a long-term convener and not just a crisis manager.

Anwar has long been known as a reformist and a consensus-builder. His handling of this crisis has now added a new credential to his portfolio: regional statesman.

For Malaysia, this moment should be a reminder of what thoughtful diplomacy and principled leadership can achieve.

The BBC reported that US President Donald Trump may have delivered the impetus with his trade talks threat that enabled this ceasefire, but it is Malaysia that is getting the credit.

It said, “The world was watching – and Malaysia delivered.” – Bernama

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