

# 'PROTECT THE POOR AND VULNERABLE'

**Region's growth must improve its people's welfare and dignity, says PM**

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**A**SEAN must prioritise poverty eradication and protection of vulnerable communities as the central pillars of its development agenda, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

In an interview with Asean media ahead of the 46th Asean Summit, Bernama reported that Anwar said economic growth must lead to tangible improvements in welfare, social protection and human dignity for the people in the region.

"The issue of poverty is very close to my heart. Here (in Malaysia), I have made it clear that we must aim for zero poverty. Although it (poverty) may resurface, the country has no reason to allow that to happen. We will have to resolve that, and we've been relatively successful in that.

"Of course, every country has to do it within their own limits and capabilities, but what's important is a firm commitment."

He also challenged Asean to act on the pledges it had repeatedly

made in joint declarations, where poverty, inequality and development gaps were frequently mentioned.

He said the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Asean 2025 already outlined poverty eradication and inclusive growth as core goals and called on Asean leaders to maintain momentum on these fronts.

Anwar also underscored the need to address systematic inequalities and prevent vulnerabilities, such as scams and human trafficking.

"Cybersecurity and scams are major issues that should be addressed. We now have effective cooperation from Laos and Cambodia in tackling these issues, both at the bilateral level and through Asean mecha-



Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan leading his Asean counterparts in a meeting with Gulf country representatives in the Asean-GCC meeting in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. PIC BY AIZUDDIN SAAD

nisms," he said.

Looking ahead to Asean 2040 and beyond, Anwar said the region's success would rest on good governance, deeper integration and collective action.

He said Asean's centrality and non-aligned posture allowed it to trade and cooperate with a wide range of partners, including BRICS nations, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and China.

"If we only think of national interests, of course, there are limits but as Asean has more than 640 million people and a US\$3 trillion economy, the potential is enormous.

"The final judgment will be the welfare of our people, quality education, public health, infrastructure, and lifting the poor.

These are human dignity issues and they are the real test of our success," he added.

Anwar also expressed optimism for the current summit, noting that consensus had been built around key issues, including the Asean power grid, digital connectivity and intra-regional trade.

The 46th Asean Summit, which is being held under Malaysia's 2025 chairmanship, is themed "Inclusivity and Sustainability".

It marks Malaysia's fifth time chairing Asean, following previous terms in 1977, 1997, 2005 and 2015.

Meanwhile, the decision by all major stakeholders in Myanmar to participate in direct engagement with Asean leaders marked a significant step forward in ef-

forts to resolve the country's protracted conflict, said Anwar.

He said the recent meeting in Bangkok, involving the Asean Troika and Myanmar's Foreign Minister U Than Shwe, had reflected a shift in attitude, especially from the military junta.

Anwar said he had also urged his counterparts in Brunei, Indonesia, Vietnam and Cambodia to engage Myanmar with the aim of achieving a full ceasefire to the ongoing civil war the and ensuring unhindered humanitarian assistance to the people.

On Saturday, Asean foreign ministers commended Malaysia's proactive leadership in reviving efforts to implement the Five-Point Consensus and facilitating constructive dialogue to address the crisis in Myanmar.