

## ASEAN SUMMIT

# 'MOST SUBSTANTIVE MILESTONE IN HISTORY'

**Goals met thanks to unity among bloc's leaders, says Anwar**

KUALA LUMPUR

**T**HE 46th Asean Summit and Related Summits is one of the "most substantive" milestones in Asean's history, said Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim.

Anwar, who is Asean chairman, said the summit met its objectives thanks to the strong support and unity among the bloc's leaders, as well as its first meaningful engagement with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations and China.

He said the inaugural meeting in Riyadh was more of a formality but this summit featured sessions, discussions and a detailed joint statement.

"Likewise, the presence of Chinese Premier Li Qiang is significant. We have achieved one of the most substantive Asean Summits in history, along with meaningful discussions with the GCC," he said at a press conference yesterday.

Anwar said Asean member states agreed that any decision on tariffs must be guided by a shared understanding within the bloc, following the United States' im-



position of unilateral tariffs on Asean members.

Any decision, he said, should not be made at the expense of other member countries.

He denied suggestions that Asean was leaning too heavily towards China, stressing that the bloc remained committed to balanced engagement with all major powers, including the US.

On the perceptions of a China tilt amid the increasing partnerships, Anwar said this was merely a "perception".

"What is Asean's position? Centrality. What is the focus? Welfare, our people's well-being, economic relations, trade, investment.

"As such, we will do it if it

means working with China, as well as (working) with the US."

Anwar said the summit also saw regional leaders discussing the South China Sea issue, including the code of conduct.

He said Philippine leaders and Chinese Premier Li Qiang had engaged in exchanges during the summit over maritime disputes between the two nations.

"I'm not saying that all issues can be resolved now but at least there is a real meaningful positive engagement and that is the new spirit of Asean."

On Timor-Leste, Anwar said Asean would do "whatever is necessary" to ensure it becomes the bloc's 11th member by October.

He said Asean had agreed to accept Timor-Leste as a full member, pending the completion of legal requirements under the Asean Foreign Ministers' framework.

"Timor-Leste has been working hard, (but) there are parameters and pillars that need to be met, (including) political, economic, legal and they have tried very hard.

"The decision was clearly to agree it would become accepted as a full member by the next session in October.

"However, this is subject to one or two actions or reforms, particularly to fulfil one or two conditions under the economic pillar (in the framework)."