

Timor-Leste to join Asean in October

PM: Asean satisfied with the nation's efforts to fulfil criteria

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KUALA LUMPUR: Timor-Leste's wait to be included in Asean will be over in five months, when they will be granted full membership at the next regional meeting, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim announced.

The Prime Minister said Asean leaders have agreed to accept Timor-Leste as the 11th member of the association at the next Asean Summit in October.

He said Timor-Leste has been working hard to fulfil requirements to become an Asean member and Malaysia is satisfied with the country's efforts.

"Malaysia, Indonesia and a number of other countries have assisted in many ways to ensure that they meet this precondition. I

would say we are quite satisfied.

"The decision is to agree that they will be accepted as a full member by the next session in October," said Anwar during his exit press conference after the 46th Asean Summit and Related Summits yesterday.

He said Timor-Leste has to fulfil "one or two" economic preconditions to be admitted as a full member of Asean.

"The consensus is that we will do whatever is necessary to ensure that they come in by October as a full member," he added.

Current Asean members are Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and the Philippines.

Timor-Leste was officially recognised by the United Nations in 2002, making it Asia's youngest democracy.



Seeking solutions: Anwar (right) with Asean leaders attending the second Asean-Gulf Cooperation Council summit at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre in Kuala Lumpur. - AZHAR MAHFOF/The Star

The country officially applied for Asean membership in 2011 and was granted observer status in 2022.

Its Prime Minister Kay Rala Xanana Gusmao, who was also in Kuala Lumpur to attend the Summit, was reported as being optimistic about securing the full membership by the end of this year.

Meanwhile, Anwar said as Asean Chair this year, Malaysia is hoping to come up with tangible programmes that will benefit the people by October.

Anwar said various ministries and officials will have to start

working on these initiatives.

"So by October, we want to see the results. We want to see real change that will benefit the people," he added.

The Prime Minister said the Asean Summit and Related Summits achieved its objectives by successfully bringing together the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and China at the same table, crediting the outcome to the strong spirit of unity and the unwavering support of all regional leaders.

Reflecting on the engagements throughout the summit, Anwar said Malaysia's chairmanship had

enabled deeper discussions with Asean's external partners.

He also said discussions held throughout the summit had been fruitful.

"There is a dramatic change in terms of attitude. The South China Sea was discussed, and we also saw exchanges between the Philippines and China.

"I'm not saying these issues can be resolved, but at least there is meaningful and positive engagement. That is the spirit of Asean," added Anwar.

Malaysia is the Chair of Asean this year, having held the post in 1977, 1997, 2005 and 2015.