

Asean holds firm amid global turmoil

Anwar cites bloc resilience, unity and shared milestones as key to navigating economic uncertainty and rising protectionism

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has lauded Asean's remarkable resilience despite strains to the global trading system, thanks largely to the grouping's numerous milestones, including the establishment of the Asean community and more importantly, its ability to resolve issues collectively.

"The milestones offer a renewed sense of optimism and confidence for Asean, underscored by remarkable resilience against a backdrop of increasingly complex and sobering global developments,"

Anwar said at the 46th Asean Summit yesterday.

Addressing fellow leaders from the 10-member grouping, he said Malaysia is honoured to chair Asean this year, which is of special significance, Bernama reported.

"We mark a decade since the establishment of the Asean Community, inviting both reflection and renewal. At the same time, we will adopt a forward-looking 20-year vision that necessitates our unwavering commitment and collective resolve."

The 46th Asean Summit, being held under Malaysia's 2025

Chairmanship, is themed "Inclusivity and Sustainability".

"Indeed, a transition in the geopolitical order is underway, and the global trading system is under further strain, with the recent imposition of unilateral United States tariffs," he said.

Anwar, who is also finance minister, lamented that "protectionism is resurging as we bear witness to multilateralism breaking apart at the seams"

"Nevertheless, we are thankful for the spirit of centrality and fraternity among Asean member states in being able to come together to forge a

common front in dealing with these challenges.

"Noteworthy is our expeditious response in dealing with the US tariffs through the establishment of the Asean Geo-economics Task Force, a necessary step not just for coordination, but to demonstrate resolution and confidence," the prime minister said.

The task force holds discussions and exchanges views on the regional economic outlook, including the latest developments concerning US unilateral tariff policies, national initiatives and the way forward.

It is to be noted that Asean took a non-retaliatory stance on the US tariffs, which have now been paused, while others - namely China, Canada and the European Union - responded in a more confrontational manner.

Heads of state present included the Sultan of Brunei Sultan Hassanal

Bolkiah, Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet, Laos Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone, Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, Singapore Prime Minister Lawrence Wong and Thailand Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra. Also in attendance were Timor-Leste Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao as observer and Asean secretary-general Dr Kao Kim Houn.

This year marks Malaysia's fifth time chairing Asean, having previously held the chairmanship in 1977, 1997, 2005 and 2015.

Two pivotal high-level engagements - the 2nd Asean-GCC Summit and the inaugural Asean-GCC-China Summit - will also be convened, serving as strategic platforms to advance regional and inter-regional cooperation.