

Anwar defends Thaksin's appointment as Asean adviser

KUALA LUMPUR: Any individual's appointment as an informal adviser to the Asean Chair are made strictly on the basis of their expertise and experience in geopolitics and regional affairs, particularly in relation to Myanmar, says Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

In a written parliamentary reply, the Prime Minister said the question of conducting background checks "does not arise" as those selected are figures who previously held the highest offices in their respective countries, especially in international affairs.

"These individuals also volunteered their services and expertise on the basis of longstanding friendships among Asean countries," he said in the reply dated Tuesday.

Anwar was responding to MP Datuk Seri Dr Shahidan Kassim of Arau, who had asked whether the Prime Minister conducted background checks before appointing any informal adviser to the Asean Chair, and sought clarification on their actual role and necessity.

The Prime Minister's reply comes against the backdrop of Malaysia's previous appointment of former Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra to the informal advisory group during Malaysia's Asean chairmanship last December.

Malaysia handed the chairmanship to the Philippines last month.

Thaksin, who served as Thailand's premier from 2001 until he was ousted in a 2006 military coup, returned from self-exile in August 2023 to face jail time but spent six months under detention, before he was released on parole in February last year.

However, in September, he was sentenced to one year in prison by Thailand's Supreme Court after the previous hospital stay was ruled unlawful.

Prior to his appointment as an Asean informal adviser, Thaksin reportedly held meetings with various groups opposing Myanmar's military junta, including the National Unity Government, in efforts to help mediate the conflict.

In April last year, Anwar himself met Myanmar junta leader General Min Aung Hlaing in Bangkok, describing the engagement as "an Asean mandate".

He said the meeting, the first by an Asean chair since the coup, aimed to secure a ceasefire and facilitate post-earthquake humanitarian assistance following the devastating March 28 quake, adding that the matter had been discussed with all Asean leaders, with none raising any objection.