

GROUPING'S 11TH MEMBER

# TIMOR-LESTE WELCOMED INTO THE FOLD

Delegates get emotional as country completes process that began in 2011

KUALA LUMPUR

**I**T was an emotional and historic moment for members of the Timor-Leste delegation and media as their nation became the 11th member of Asean.

As the Declaration on the Admission of Timor-Leste into Asean was signed and the country's flag was placed alongside those of other member states, many journalists from the country were visibly moved.

Some were seen wiping away tears as they witnessed their nation's long-awaited entry into the regional bloc.

Delegate Francisca Maia said the historic moment was deeply meaningful for the people and her country after applying for

membership in 2011.

"As citizens who had the opportunity to witness this moment in Kuala Lumpur, we are very proud that our government's long struggle to become a member state has finally become a reality.

"It is a beautiful, emotional and inspiring moment to be part of the delegation — and this is also my first time in Malaysia," she said, wiping away tears.

SMnews Timor-Leste journalist Remizia Boavida expressed her excitement in covering the historic occasion.

"This is a moment everyone has been waiting for, for a very long time. I am proud to be here covering it, and at the same time witnessing this historic moment broadcast live on television.



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim looking on as Asean Secretary-General Dr Kao Kim Hourn (right) shakes hands with Timor-Leste President Jose Ramos-Horta alongside Timor-Leste Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao during the signing ceremony of the declaration on the admission of Timor-Leste into Asean yesterday. REUTERS PIC

"Thank you, Malaysia. Thank you, Asean, for finally making our dream of becoming an official member state come true."

Timor-Leste gained independence in 2002 and applied to join Asean in 2011. Feasibility studies were conducted to assess the country's readiness in terms of political stability, economic capacity and institutional preparedness.

In 2022, Asean granted Timor-Leste observer status, allowing it

to attend all Asean meetings.

Efforts to expedite Timor-Leste's full admission into Asean were intensified under Malaysia's chairmanship of the bloc, led by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

The last time Asean admitted a new member was in 1999, when Cambodia joined.

The signing of the declaration to admit Timor-Leste was witnessed by leaders of the 10 other member states.

Anwar, in his keynote address, said Timor-Leste's admission gives new meaning to the bloc's vision of building a peaceful, stable, inclusive and prosperous regional community.

"It's place here completes the Asean family, reaffirming our shared destiny and deep sense of regional kinship.

"Within this community, Timor-Leste's development and its strategic autonomy will find firm and lasting support."