

Asean to have 11 members

Timor-Leste officially joins regional bloc on Oct 26

SERI ISKANDAR: Timor-Leste will officially become a full member of Asean on Oct 26, says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

He said Malaysia, through the Foreign Ministry, had been working actively to ensure Timor-Leste's permanent inclusion in the regional bloc.

"We supported Timor-Leste from the beginning, but recently we've been working hard to ensure it is accepted as a permanent member of Asean," he said during a session with Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS (UTP) students here yesterday.

Also present were Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Saarani Mohamad, Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Dr Zambry Abd Kadir, Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Shamsul Azri Abu Bakar and UTP president Mohamed Firouz Ansan, Bernama reported.

Anwar was also in Perak to launch the National Sports Day celebration.

The 47th Asean Summit is scheduled to be held from Oct 26 to 28 in Kuala Lumpur, with world leaders including US President Donald Trump, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Asean heads of government and dialogue partners expected to attend.

In the Joint Statement of the Asean Foreign Ministers' Meeting at the 58th Asean Economic Community on July 9, ministers reaffirmed their commitment to support Timor-Leste in accelerating its participation in major Asean economic agreements to facilitate full integration into the bloc.

Timor-Leste, the youngest country in South-East Asia, applied for Asean membership in 2011, nine years after achieving independence on May 20, 2002.

In February, Malaysia announced a contribution of US\$200,000 to the Timor-Leste Unit at the Asean Secretariat in Jakarta to accelerate the membership process.

It also continues to provide technical training through the Malaysia Technical Cooperation Programme, which has trained 319 Timor-Leste officials in various fields to date.

Later, at the Madani Excellent SPM Programme at SMJK Yuk Choy, Anwar told 1,500 SPM candidates that the government is committed to expanding educational opportunities for Malaysians, particularly high-achieving students.

He said efforts were underway to increase study placements both locally and abroad.

"Although 170,000 foreign students want to study here, Malaysians will always be given priority.

"Under Budget 2026, we are providing 1,500 additional places for outstanding STPM and matriculation students," he said.

Also present was Deputy Education Minister Wong Kah Woh.

When tabling Budget 2026, Anwar announced that 1,500 new

places for bachelor's degree studies would be created in 10 key fields at the country's five research universities.

Top performing students will receive priority in fields such as law, accounting, economics, banking, Islamic finance, artificial intelligence and languages.

Anwar added that international students also play a crucial role in strengthening Malaysia's position as an international educational hub, emphasising that their presence does not threaten opportunities for locals.

"If international students come here, they pay full fees. Don't stop them from coming. We need their participation," he said.

He added that education continues to receive the largest allocation in the national budget.

"Many countries prioritise defence spending.

"We are fortunate to live in a peaceful region, so our biggest allocation goes to education because that is our future," he said.