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Malaysia ushers in new era for Asean

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim yesterday called for renewed unity and purpose within Asean as he welcomed Timor-Leste into the regional bloc, marking its historic admission as the 11th member.

Speaking at the opening of the 47th Asean Summit here, Anwar said Malaysia, as this year's Asean Chair, bore the responsibility of steering the bloc through a period of global uncertainty with vision, courage and conviction.

"Timor-Leste's historic admission into Asean today gives new meaning to that vision," he said, congratulating President Jose Manuel Ramos-Horta and Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao.

"Its place here completes the Asean family, reaffirming our shared destiny and deep sense of regional unity

The admission ceremony, witnessed by Anwar and the 10 Asean leaders, symbolised the culmination of more than a decade of engagement and preparation by Timor-Leste to join the grouping.

Anwar said the country's accession reflected Asean's enduring commitment to inclusivity, stability and shared growth across Southeast Asia.

"With Timor-Leste joining, the bloc grows not just in size, but in spirit. The future of Asean will be written by choice - by the choices we make today."

He also highlighted Malaysia's efforts to strengthen regional cooperation, including promoting peace in Myanmar, expanding trade and advancing digital and energy transitions.

Timor-Leste President Jose Ramos-Horta signed the declaration formalising his nation's full participation in Asean, witnessed by Anwar and his counterparts from Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and Myanmar.

Founded in 1967, Asean now comprises 11 member states - Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia,



PM marks historic admission of Timor-Leste, pledging bold, inclusive leadership and renewed regional unity

Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and Timor-Leste.

The last nation to join before Timor-Leste was Cambodia, which became Asean's 10th member on April 30, 1999.

Timor-Leste gained independence from Indonesia in

2002 following a UN-supervised referendum in 1999. It formally applied to join Asean in 2011, embarking on a decade-long effort to meet the bloc's economic and institutional benchmarks.

In November 2022, Asean leaders agreed in principle to admit Timor-Leste, granting it observer status

and a roadmap towards full membership - a process now brought to completion under Malaysia's chairmanship.

With Timor-Leste's accession, Asean achieves full geographical representation of Southeast Asia. The nation of 1.4 million remains reliant on oil and gas exports, though agriculture and services are becoming stronger contributors to its economy.

Its GDP expanded by 3.4% last year to US\$1.99 billion and is projected to grow by 3.9 per cent this year, supported by easing inflation and improving fiscal stability.



Gusmao (fifth from left) and Anwar with other Asean leaders pose for photos during the opening ceremony of the 47th Asean Summit and Related Summits yesterday. - ADAM AMIR HAMZAH/THESUN