

PM calls for diplomacy, inclusivity at East Asia Summit

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has called for continued engagement with Myanmar and North Korea, underscoring Malaysia's belief that dialogue - not isolation - remains key to resolving regional conflicts and humanitarian crises.

Speaking at the 20th East Asia Summit (EAS) at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre yesterday, Anwar said Malaysia has reached an understanding with Myanmar's military leadership to allow humanitarian aid into the conflict-torn nation under two strict conditions - an immediate ceasefire and full access to all communities.

He said the engagement took place following the March earthquake in Myanmar's Sagaing Region which was felt as far as Bangkok and prompted regional coordination on relief efforts.

"Following the earthquake in Bangkok, I met with Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and conveyed Malaysia's readiness to provide all necessary humanitarian support on two conditions.

"First, an immediate ceasefire to stop the bombings. Second, that humanitarian assistance, including our field hospital in Myanmar, be given full access to all communities irrespective of ethnicity, religion or political persuasion.

"I must commend that Senior General Min Aung agreed to this. Over the past year, we've seen relative progress. There are still complaints about some shootings, but certainly not on the scale we usually see."

Anwar also announced that Malaysia will be inviting all 27 minority groups and opposition parties from Myanmar for inclusive engagement sessions in Kuala Lumpur ahead of the country's general election in December.

The junta-ruled nation is scheduled to hold its first polls since the February 2021 coup that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's "civilian government.

However, human rights groups have rejected the election as a sham, while Asean is still mulling whether to send observers to ensure a fair process.

Anwar stressed that while the international community must uphold democratic principles, Myanmar should also be allowed to conduct its state affairs through its own national mechanisms.

He added that Malaysia would continue urging Myanmar's authorities to ensure the elections are inclusive, fair and free, while maintaining dialogue with opposition and minority groups to promote national reconciliation.

"Turning to the crisis in Gaza, Anwar urged world leaders to act decisively to end what he described as "madness, genocide and atrocities" calling for sustained international efforts towards a just and inclusive political settlement.

"It is an important and critical beginning to stop this madness, genocide and atrocities. But we urge that this plan must be followed through and closely monitored so that there is lasting peace - inclusive, just and politically sustainable for Palestine."

He said Malaysia's stance remains rooted in engagement and dialogue, consistent with the values that underpin Asean and the EAS.

"Years ago, our predecessors had the wisdom and foresight to establish this summit as a forum for dialogue on issues of common concern - a forum that strengthens global norms and universally recognised values, with Asean as the driving force."

Anwar said the diversity of the EAS remains its greatest strength and a reminder of what regional cooperation can achieve when guided by inclusivity and mutual respect.

"This achievement demonstrates that diversity does not divide. Our task is to ensure that growth is fair, prosperity is widely shared and progress brings peace." - **BY FAIZ RUZMAN**