

Anwar defends Asean relevance, achievements

> Focus on solid economic fundamentals attracts major powers and investors to bloc, says PM

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has defended Asean's relevance and achievements amid criticism that the bloc remains ineffective, adding that it continues to stand out as one of the most peaceful and fastest-growing regions in the world.

Speaking at the close of the 47th Asean Summit, he said Malaysia's chairmanship had built upon the bloc's longstanding record of stability and cooperation.

"What is critical in any regional body is to secure peace, and Asean is now considered one of the most peaceful regions in the world."

He also said Asean's focus on solid economic fundamentals made it one of the fastest-growing regions globally, attracting major powers and investors alike.

"Because it is peaceful, it has enormous potential to propel economic growth. We have made progress, including on the Asean Power Grid, connectivity and intra-Asean trade and investments."

He said Malaysia had sought to broaden Asean's outreach beyond its traditional partners, adding that the bloc should not overlook Africa and Latin America.

"We consider them great friends. Both President Lula da Silva (Brazil) and President Cyril Ramaphosa (South Africa) are my friends, and we want to deepen investment ties with them."

On the absence of a joint statement from the East Asia Summit, Anwar said the lack of consensus reflected current global tensions but also demonstrated Asean's continued commitment to engagement.

"They may agree or disagree, but the consensus within Asean is to ensure there is engagement. We should not stop engaging."

He reaffirmed Malaysia's neutral stance on regional security, adding that no foreign military presence would be allowed to act provocatively in Malaysian waters.

"Our maritime policy is consistent with Asean centrality... engaging all, without aligning against anyone."

Anwar said Malaysia's balanced and moderate foreign policy, engaging both the United States and China as well as other global partners, was aimed at safeguarding the nation's image, economy and people's welfare.

"Some say we are too close to China, others say we welcome America too much. But we maintain good ties with everyone because trade and investment from these countries benefit Malaysians."

He described the inclusion of Timor-Leste as Asean's 11th member as a "historic and emotional moment" adding that Malaysia fully supports its admission regardless of economic status.

On Myanmar, Anwar reaffirmed Malaysia's commitment to the Asean Five-Point Consensus, saying Putrajaya's engagement with both the military leadership and other stakeholders helped reduce violence.

"The situation is far from ideal, but fewer massacres and displacements are happening now compared with two or three years ago."

Anwar also dismissed criticism over the presence of United States President Donald Trump at the summit, adding that the occasion was used to convey Malaysia's firm stand on Palestine.

He said he had a private four-eye discussion with Trump inside the US presidential limousine.

"I told him directly, thank you for stopping the attacks (ceasefire), but a comprehensive solution must include recognising the rights and sovereignty of the Palestinian people."

