

TIMOR-LESTE CAN OPEN DOORS

It will help Asean make inroads into Lusophone nations, says Anwar

IYLIA MARSYA ISKANDAR
KUALA LUMPUR
iyliamarsya@nst.com.my

TIMOR-LESTE'S position in the Lusophone (Portuguese-speaking) world places it uniquely to facilitate new inroads for Asean into this grouping, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

He said Timor-Leste had persevered in its processes towards full accession to Asean and was set to join the economic bloc next month.

"As Asean continues to drive efforts to broaden its regional engagements with other groupings, Timor-Leste can facilitate new inroads, particularly with the Lusophone world.

"With our member nations and a further 35 associate observers, and with growing collaboration on its agenda, this community should be on our radar.

"To germinate those connections and collaborations, it would be advantageous for Asean to have a member state that has been a part of the Lusophone Community for over two decades.

"I should mention at this juncture that my good friend, President (Luiz Inacio) Lula da Silva of Brazil, a key mover within the community and also within the broader Global South, will be attending the Asean Summit next month," he said in his presidential lecture and acceptance of the conferment of the Grand Collar of



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim with his Timor-Leste counterpart, Kay Rala Xanana Gusmao, at a press conference in Dili yesterday. BERNAMA PIC

the Order of Timor-Leste during his working visit to the country yesterday.

Anwar said he looked forward to Timor-Leste playing an active role in advancing Asean's ties with Pacific Island nations.

"When people ask me, 'Anwar, why is it that you're so adamant in ensuring that Timor-Leste becomes a full member of Asean as soon as possible?', my view, my answer is simple.

"Whether a country is newly independent or relatively poorer is insignificant. It is part of our region, and it has great experience and will contribute enormously to our enterprise to strengthen the bonds of Asean."

Anwar lauded Timor-Leste's fortitude, its demonstration of significant moral courage and conviction against cruelty and injustice.

"The people of Timor-Leste do not need to be told and lectured on what it is to be oppressed or jailed, to be persecuted, or to

have violence and bloodletting inflicted on them.

"You have gone through and suffered the mayhem and atrocities, but you have also emerged stronger, more durable, more resolved not to have such cruelty being perpetrated against you or any other vulnerable people.

"While some nations have demonstrated moral cowardice in spite of being even more economically advanced than Timor-Leste, you have demonstrated the courage of your moral convictions against cruelty, ensuring justice," he said.

Anwar said he looked forward to Timor-Leste remaining courageous once it officially becomes a full Asean member.

He commended Timor-Leste's perseverance in the processes of full accession to Asean.

"We are on the cusp of worthy and truly well-earned adjustments, and I express my profound thanks to the speaker and members of parliament (MPs)

who actually did contribute and continue to do so to ensure that the process is perfected, accelerated at a faster pace.

"So thank you to all MPs, government and opposition alike.

"If you hold the course domestically on principled positions and values in governance, there is no reason why Timor-Leste could not become Asean's moral sounding board," he said.

Anwar is on a two-day working visit to Timor-Leste, which includes a historic address to the National Parliament.

He was conferred the Grand Collar of the Order of Timor-Leste, the country's highest honour.

Anwar said he was humbled and grateful to receive the award.

It was previously awarded to leaders, such as Sultan of Brunei, Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, former Indonesian presidents Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Joko Widodo and former Cambodian leader Hun Sen.