

'WE MUST ACT WITH WISDOM'

Malaysia keeping ties with Iran despite Trump's tariff threat

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia will continue trade and diplomatic relations with Iran, guided by national interest, prudence and respect for sovereignty, despite a warning by United States President Donald Trump that Washington would impose a 25 per cent tariff on goods from countries that continue doing business with Teheran.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said Malaysia would manage its diplomatic relations with wisdom, ensuring the country neither appears weak nor takes actions that could jeopardise its interests.

"On trade with Iran, our relationship remains intact. I have personally engaged with Iran on two occasions and several ministers have also been sent there.

"In all matters of international relations, we must act with wisdom. We must not appear overly weak but, at the same time, we must avoid actions that could undermine the country's interests," he told the Dewan Rakyat during Prime Minister's Question Time.

He was responding to supplementary questions by Jimmy Puah Wee Tse (PH-Tebrau) on

whether Trump's announcement would affect Malaysia's relations or trade with Iran.

Anwar stressed that Malaysia's position was rooted in principle, including the defence of Iran's rights and sovereignty.

"As far as relations with Iran are concerned, they remain intact. We continue to uphold and defend Iran's rights and sovereignty. That is a principle we stand by."

As part of efforts to intensify pressure on Teheran, Trump announced on Jan 12 that the US would impose an immediate 25 per cent tariff on goods from countries continuing to trade with Iran.

On Malaysia-US trade ties, Anwar said the Agreement on Reciprocal Trade (ART) had yet to come into force as negotiations were ongoing and no final implementation schedule had been set.

"It has not been finalised because there is still room for responses and a final schedule for those responses has not yet been established. Therefore, enforcement has not taken place."

He said the cabinet would review any proposed amendments, adjustments or clarifications, with Investment, Trade and In-

dustry Minister Datuk Seri Johari Abdul Ghani expected to provide further details.

Discussions with the Office of the US Trade Representative, said Anwar, included verbal assurances on certain clauses but these had yet to be formalised.

"While assurances have been given verbally, it is preferable for such guarantees to be documented or appended to the agreement before it is finalised."

Malaysia and the US signed the ART on Oct 26 during the 47th Asean Summit in Kuala Lumpur.

Under the agreement, proposed by Washington, tariffs on Malaysian goods would be renegotiated to 19 per cent from 25 per cent, in line with Executive Order 14257 issued by Trump on April 2 last year. The agreement takes effect 60 days after both parties have exchanged written notifications confirming completion of domestic legal procedures.

On geopolitics, Anwar said Malaysia was adopting a cautious stance on a proposed Board of Peace initiated by Trump to oversee post-war governance in the Palestinian territories.

While Malaysia supports gen-

uine efforts to secure peace in Palestine, he said the proposal raised serious concerns over its composition, mandate and credibility, particularly as violence in Gaza had yet to cease.

"Peace is, of course, a positive aspiration, particularly if it can pressure Israel to stop its aggression. However, at this stage, the attacks are ongoing," he said, adding that the cabinet would deliberate on the matter.

He expressed strong reservations over the reported inclusion of certain people, including former British prime minister Tony Blair, and said Malaysia would seek the views of Arab nations, Turkiye and other partners before taking a position.

Malaysia's stance, he said, remained firm that any peace initiative must begin with an immediate halt to hostilities and unhindered humanitarian access.

"The first step must be to stop the attacks. The second is to allow increased humanitarian aid — food, basic necessities and a dignified living for the people."

He said Malaysia must balance principle and diplomacy, noting that international positions were

determined through consultations with neighbours and friendly nations to safeguard national interests.

"Malaysia is a country with moderate strength. That is why, before taking any action, we deliberate with our neighbours and allies."

Despite the risks, Anwar said Malaysia had taken firm positions on issues such as Gaza and Venezuela, including opposing actions that contravene international law.

"Could this create problems? Yes, it could. But we nevertheless maintain diplomatic relations with the US and all other countries."

On developments concerning Greenland, Anwar said Malaysia aligned itself with the position of Europe and Denmark, stressing that while negotiations between sovereign states are acceptable, occupation or conquest of another nation is not.

"We respect the right of countries to negotiate, but the occupation or seizure of any nation is something we, as a free and sovereign country, cannot condone," he added.