

Leaders convene at historic ASEAN-GCC summit, Malaysia calls for an end to oppression of Palestinians

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RIYADH: Leaders of ASEAN and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) convened for the first time at the blocs' historic summit here on Friday, with Malaysia Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim calling upon the international community to put an end to the disproportionate treatment and flagrant hypocrisy against the Palestinians.

He said the international community must no longer turn a blind eye to the atrocities and must address the root causes of the Palestine-Israel conflict.

"Without exception, human rights must be protected and international law must be upheld. The Palestinians must be returned their land, homes and properties.

"They must be allowed to live in peace and dignity in their own sovereign state in internationally recognised borders, based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital," he said in his speech at the summit here.

Anwar said in this highly challenging time with an unprecedented humanitarian crisis that could widen into a regional and world conflict, Malaysia hoped that all nations would come together to find a long-lasting and just solution to this conflict.

The Prime Minister said he looks forward to members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), particularly the five permanent members - United States, China, France, Russia, and the United Kingdom - to play their role as honest peace brokers.

"This is the time for the world to come together," he stressed.

Anwar said Malaysia is both gravely alarmed and deeply saddened by the high number of civilian casualties due to the latest escalation of clashes in and around the Gaza Strip.

"We condemn Israel's disproportionate and indiscriminate bombing in Gaza and the blocking of basic and essential needs to those in Gaza, putting the lives of many Palestinians in peril," he said.

Of immediate concern, Anwar said there is an urgent need to establish humanitarian corridors to deliver assistance to those in need.

Meanwhile, Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman reiterated the Kingdom's support for efforts to reach a just solution to the Palestinian cause.

In his opening speech at the summit, the Crown Prince also said that he was saddened by the escalating violence in Gaza, for which innocent people were paying the price.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo, who led the 10-nation ASEAN this year, in his opening statement also called for an end to the violence in Gaza in accordance with international laws.

Jokowi co-chaired the summit with Crown Prince Mohammed.

The inaugural ASEAN-GCC summit brought together the two prominent blocs made up of 10 ASEAN member states and the six members of the GCC - Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman.

Brunei Darussalam Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Vietnam Prime Minister Pham Minh Chin, Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet were among the ASEAN leaders attending the summit.

ASEAN-GCC relations began in 1990 and have been growing over the years as both sides realised the huge potential in expanding trade and geopolitical strategies.

Besides the Palestine-Israel conflict, the summit is expected to discuss a wide range of significant topics primarily focusing on trade, energy and economics apart from enhancing ties between both sides.

The summit is also expected to adopt a comprehensive plan of action spanning from 2024 to 2028, covering substantive areas of cooperation.

This includes heightened collaboration in the energy sector, exchanges on low-carbon technologies, enhanced cooperation in finance and banking, as well as the development of halal certification standards.

The value of trade between ASEAN nations currently stands at more than \$110 billion.

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