

## Malaysia Urges ASEAN to Unite on Looming US Tariffs

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— Categories: Economics



Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has urged members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to present a united front in response to new tariffs imposed by the United States, warning that the measures could weaken the region's economic stability.

Speaking to ASEAN foreign ministers gathered in Kuala Lumpur on Wednesday, Anwar emphasized that tariffs, export restrictions, and barriers to investment have become

powerful tools in global political rivalries. He called on the 10-member bloc to tackle this reality with “clarity and conviction” while strengthening trade among themselves.

“Tariffs, export restrictions, and investment barriers have now become the sharpened instruments of geopolitical rivalry,” Anwar said. “ASEAN must confront this reality.”

The concern comes after former U.S. President Donald Trump announced a set of so-called “Liberation Day” tariffs in April. These duties range from 10 to 49 percent and target multiple countries, including six ASEAN nations. Although a negotiation period was extended to August 1, several countries still face steep rates.

For example, Malaysia’s tariff increased slightly from 24 to 25 percent. While Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar saw their rates reduced, Thailand and Indonesia’s tariffs remained unchanged. Vietnam negotiated a significant cut, lowering its tariff from 46 percent to 20 percent.

A draft joint statement prepared for the annual ASEAN meeting describes these tariffs as “counterproductive” and warns they could worsen global economic fragmentation. The foreign ministers are expected to release a final communique expressing their collective worries.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio is also in Kuala Lumpur this week for talks with ASEAN partners. According to the U.S. State Department, Rubio’s visit aims to reaffirm the United States’ commitment to maintaining a free, open, and secure Indo-Pacific region.

Besides trade tensions, the ongoing conflict in Myanmar was a major focus of the discussions. Malaysian Foreign Minister Mohamad Hasan called on all parties to create an environment where elections can be held fairly. Myanmar’s military, which seized power in 2021, plans to hold elections later this year, but the party of detained leader Aung San Suu Kyi is expected to be excluded.

ASEAN leaders are likely to repeat their call for Myanmar to honor a five-point consensus agreement reached in 2021 to end violence and support dialogue. However, little progress has been made so far.

The South China Sea disputes also appeared on the agenda, as ASEAN and China continue working on a code of conduct to avoid maritime confrontations. China’s top diplomat Wang Yi is expected to join the talks later this week.

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