

Look East Policy now includes China, says PM

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Malaysia which has long looked to Japan and South Korea as models for economic development, is now also interested in learning from China, revealed Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim.

“We need to be open to revising any policy that has been in place for 40 years,” he told Asahi Shimbun in an interview in Tokyo on Sunday.

He was referring to the Look East Policy that fourth prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad introduced in 1982 to learn economic modernisation strategies primarily from Japan and South Korea.

“I wouldn’t say ‘East’ (in this policy) means Japan and South Korea minus China. Now, when we say ‘Look East,’ it’s East (including China)”, he was quoted as saying by the Japanese newspaper.

Anwar said because digital technologies, cybersecurity and other issues are changing the world, Malaysia needs to expand on the decades-old policy while

continuing its aspects that remain beneficial.

Territorial disputes

Anwar undertook a five-day working visit to Tokyo from Dec 15 to attend a summit celebrating the 50th anniversary of the friendship and cooperation between Japan and Asean.

Malaysia advocates a "fiercely independent" foreign policy, and Anwar said the country will deal with China depending on Malaysia's interests.

Anwar said when he visited the United States during Apec 2023 recently, he was asked why Malaysia is tilting toward China.

He replied: "Because they're investing more."

But Anwar said Malaysia will firmly negotiate with China over territorial disputes in the South China Sea and not allow any unilateral action by Beijing.

The prime minister also described Japan as a "very important strategic partner", adding that Malaysia's relationship with Japan should be expanded under the Look East policy such as sharing Japanese work ethics and technologies.

Strategic partnership

According to Asahi Shimbun, Japan announced on Dec 16 that it will provide equipment for warning and surveillance activity worth 400 million yen (about RM13.2 million), including rescue boats and drones, to the Malaysian military under the official security assistance programme.

Anwar emphasised that the defence equipment is designed to help Malaysia protect its territorial waters and does not include any submarines or large aircraft.

“(The assistance is) mainly for our own security needs, not for offensive or aggressive means,” it quoted Anwar as saying.

During the visit, Malaysia and Japan had elevated their bilateral relations to comprehensive strategic partnership.

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