

Xi invited to mark 50th anniversary of ties next year

BEIJING: Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has extended an invitation to Chinese President Xi Jinping to visit Malaysia to mark the 50th anniversary next year of diplomatic ties between the two countries.

Wrapping up his high-profile maiden visit to China as Prime Minister, Anwar said he expected either Xi or Chinese Premier Li Qiang to make the trip.

"It could be next year or even earlier. We are close strategic partners," he told Malaysian journalists covering his four-day visit here last night.

Xi was last in Malaysia in 2013 when the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement was signed.

Before heading to the Chinese capital on Thursday, Anwar was at

the Boao Forum for Asia in Boao, Hainan, where he delivered an address.

Anwar said he was very optimistic of future relations with China based on his candid interactions with Xi and Li.

"They were very supportive and cooperative and I have every reason to be optimistic of the road ahead," he added.

The Prime Minister said among the matters discussed with the Chinese leadership was the Belt and Road Initiative and the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL), adding that it was decided that Chinese expertise would only be brought in if the need arose.

"Otherwise, priority is to be given to Malaysian workers," he added.

The ECRL is a standard gauge

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Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim

railway link infrastructure project connecting Port Klang in Selangor to Kota Baru in Kelantan.

Up to 40% of the 665km track is said to have been completed.

Anwar said with China having fully reopened recently, its tourists

would begin visiting Malaysia again in droves and there was a need to increase flight frequencies and direct services between Kuala Lumpur and Beijing.

On educational cooperation, he said he had discussed the possibility

of China's top-ranked Tsinghua University opening a branch campus in Malaysia.

"I talked directly on this with the top level of the university on my visit to the Beijing campus," he added.

To a question, Anwar said his anti-corruption drive back home was also a topic of discussion with Xi and Li.

"Till now, no one in my administration has objected to it.

"I have not heard of anything like that.

"We will press on with the aim of eradicating the scourge of corruption," he said before departing for Kuala Lumpur last night.

He was accompanied on his trip by five Cabinet ministers and a 200-member trade delegation.