

A NEW ERA OF KL-MANILA TIES

Anwar, Marcos agree to boost cooperation, including people-to-people connections



**AZMAN
ABDUL HAMID**

MANILA

A NEW era of closer relations has begun between Malaysia and the Philippines as Prime

Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr reached agreements on many issues of mutual concern.

In a joint press conference at Malacanang Palace here, both leaders agreed to enhance and revitalise cooperation, including people-to-people connections.

From security to trade and tourism, Anwar and Marcos talked about multidimensional levels of relations.

National and regional security was emphasised by both leaders, with Marcos thanking Malaysia for its role in achieving peace in the southern Philippines.

"We hope Malaysia will continue to contribute to the peace and establishment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region," he said.

Anwar also thanked Marcos for his offer of support for efforts to revitalise and upgrade cooperation between both countries.

The prime minister shared Marcos's concerns and highlighted the need to find solutions in the South China Sea and the Myanmar internal conflict.

"I did express my concern about the contentious unresolved Myanmar (developments) affecting Malaysia adversely due to the huge number of refugees, exceeding 200,000 people now, in Malaysia," said Anwar.

"The president, in his wisdom, has reiterated the need for the (Asean) Five-Point Consensus, but I would certainly suggest an



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim shaking hands with Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr at Malacanang Palace in Manila yesterday.
BERNAMA PIC

exploration of new areas on how the Myanmar junta can be persuaded to work and collaborate as a team within Asean, and resolve the outstanding issue that cannot be considered as purely internal because it is affecting the security and welfare of the region.

"We did discuss the South China Sea issue and I shared President Marcos's concern that due to the complexity of the issue, we should try and engage and take a position at the multilateral level between Asean so that we have a comprehensive approach and can achieve an amicable solution to this outstanding problem."

Both leaders shared the view that it was necessary to focus on the halal sector, with Marcos seeing it as another way of tackling food security, while Anwar hoped that it would further deepen trade between the two countries.

The leaders were speaking at a joint press conference after Anwar called on Marcos at Malacanang Palace. Present were Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Zambry Abdul Kadir and Home Minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail.

Earlier, Marcos led the welcoming ceremony for Anwar at the palace on the first day of his official two-day visit.

Negaraku was played, followed by the Philippine national anthem.

A 19-cannon salute was sounded before both Anwar and Marcos inspected the guard of honour mounted by the Philippine army.

The two sides then held a bilateral meeting that culminated in agreements to enhance cooperation of mutual concern, including on regional and international issues.

Marcos later hosted a dinner banquet for Anwar.

In November last year, Marcos had called Anwar to congratulate him on his election win and had expressed his desire to work with Malaysia.

Anwar's visit to Manila is his first as prime minister. Besides Zambry and Saifuddin, Anwar is also accompanied by wife Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, and officials from relevant ministries and agencies.

Today, all eyes will on Anwar's lecture at the University of Philippines, where he will also be conferred an honorary doctorate.

He will also hold a dialogue with the Malaysian diaspora.

Anwar's visit to the Philippines reflected the two nations' good relations as close neighbours, partners and as founding members of Asean.

"It (Anwar's visit) will provide an excellent opportunity for both sides to advance the partnership for progress, guided by shared interests, increased political and economic cooperation, and people-to-people exchanges," said Wisma Putra.

The latest security cooperation by the countries witnessed the Philippine Navy and Joint Task Force Tawi-Tawi personnel together with the Royal Malaysian Navy rescuing six crew members and 15 passengers of a stranded Philippine vessel in Malaysian waters on Feb 26.

In 2022, Malaysia was the Philippines' 5th top trading partner among Asean member-states and 15th largest trading partner globally.

Since 2001, Malaysia has played an important role as a third party facilitator in the peace process between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.