

PM aims to strengthen bilateral ties in Manila visit



**AZMAN
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MANILA: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim will start a two-day visit to the Philippine capital today with a meeting with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr that is hoped will lead to a strengthening of relations between the two countries.

Anwar arrived with his wife, Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, and Entrepreneurship and Cooperatives Development Minister Datuk Ewon Benedick.

Also part of the delegation are Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Zambry Abdul Kadir and Home Minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail.

Speaking to Malaysian journalists, Zambry said Malaysia and the Philippines would concentrate on revitalising and renewing joint committee understanding and cooperation that were agreed on over the years.

"Both sides will relook understandings made by the joint committees to strengthen them.

"We must remember that it is not only bilateral, sometimes it is trilateral as it involves, for example, Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei and Indonesia," he said after arriving here.

Anwar and Marcos will also discuss issues of bilateral impor-

tance, especially trade and the digital economy.

On trade, Zambry said he believed relations would remain positive as the two countries had no trade disputes, so the focus would be on exploring new avenues, such as IT and the digital economy.

He said Anwar was the first state leader to make an official visit to the Philippines since Marcos was elected to the top post last year, which will strengthen relations between the two countries.

Anwar will give a lecture at the University of Philippines on "30 Years After Asian Renaissance: Strategic Takeaways for Asean".

He once delivered a speech as part of the Philippines' "100 Years of Jose Rizal" celebration. The university will confer Anwar an honorary doctorate before the speech.

Anwar will meet local media, then talk to the Malaysian diaspora here about their hopes and aspirations for his leadership.

The visit will fulfil Anwar's wish after becoming prime minister last November of seeing bilateral ties between Malaysia and the Philippines elevated.

Anwar said this when replying to a tweet by Marcos congratulating him on his appointment as Malaysia's 10th prime minister.

Marcos had said the two countries always enjoyed strong cooperation in bilateral, regional and multilateral forums.

Since becoming prime minister, Anwar has visited Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei and Thailand.