

Anwar's visit to Saudi Arabia fruitful despite not meeting king, say analysts

KUALA LUMPUR: Detractors are wrong to claim that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's visit to Saudi Arabia was not fruitful just because he did not meet King Salman Abdul Aziz Al-Saud and Crown Prince Mohammed Salman, according to analysts.

Dr Mazlan Ali, a senior lecturer at the Perdana Centre, Razak Technology and Informatics Faculty at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), said most important was the fact that Anwar had made the three-day visit at the invitation of Saudi Arabia's highest leadership.

"If critics allege that King Salman and the crown prince did not seem to welcome Anwar, why then did Anwar get the invita-

tion? And the visit has received the full commitment of Saudi conglomerates.

"This shows that although there was no audience with the king and crown prince, it did not mean that there was no proper acknowledgement of Anwar.

"It was just that circumstances did not allow the audience to take place."

Mazlan said it was not out of the ordinary for King Salman, the custodian of Islam's two holy sites, to

change his schedule, especially in Ramadan.

Anwar himself had said that he was asked to extend his stay, but he could not do so because of his commitments in Malaysia and tight schedule.

"It is normal for the Saudi monarch to make changes to His Majesty's schedule during Ramadan.

"And they (Saudi Arabian leaders) had asked the prime minister to extend his visit by two days.

"But the prime minister could not do so because he had to attend an event (breaking of fast) with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong and was scheduled to make a visit to Cambodia," he said.

Professor Dr Mohd Azizuddin Mohd Sani, of Universiti Utara Malaysia's School of Politics and International Relations, shared Mazlan's view, saying last-minute changes to the itinerary of a visit were normal, especially if the host country had to attend to more urgent matters.

Furthermore, Anwar's three-day visit was relatively short, he said.

"It is not unusual if there were

circumstances or emergencies forcing a change in schedule at the last minute," he added.

Associate Professor Dr Roy Anthony Rogers Peter Rogers, deputy director of Universiti Malaya's Asia-Europe Institute, said Anwar's visit was successful as it had boosted international relations and trade, thereby strengthening Islamic activities.

He said the three aspects would add value to the relationship between Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, which had been established for decades.

"The visit is a continuation of the close relationship between Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, where in the early history after the country's independence, Saudi Arabia was among the first to recognise Malaysia's independence and opened an embassy here in 1961.

"In fact, prime minister Tunku

Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj was appointed as the first secretary-general of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (now known as Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the relationship is already clear.

"But this visit is seen to strengthen existing ties," he said on *the Apa Khabar Malaysia* programme on Bernama TV.

He said the signing of three memoranda of understanding between Malaysian and Saudi private companies during the visit had opened opportunities for Malaysian companies to engage in the Middle East.

In addition, he described Malaysia and Saudi Arabia as having a special relationship under the umbrella of Islam, especially involving the management of haj and umrah pilgrimages, which required the cooperation of both countries. **Bernama**



Dr Mazlan Ali