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# PM'S SAUDI TRIP: WISMA PUTRA CLEARS THE AIR

**Diplomatic notes clearly state Saudi govt welcomed official trip by Anwar, says ministry**

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**T**HE Foreign Ministry said in a statement issued yesterday that Saudi officials last week confirmed that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's recent official visit to Saudi Arabia would include an audience with the top two leaders of the kingdom.

This was relayed through a diplomatic note dated March 21 received by the ministry from the Saudi Arabian embassy in Kuala Lumpur, confirming Anwar's trip to the kingdom from March 22 to 25.

The same diplomatic note, said the ministry, was received by the Malaysian embassy in Riyadh

from the Saudi Arabian government.

"The diplomatic note refers to the official visit to be undertaken by the prime minister from March 22 to 25, for which programmes included an audience with His Majesty King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud, who is the kingdom's prime minister.

"Both diplomatic notes clearly stated that the Saudi government welcomed the official trip by the prime minister to the kingdom, including performing umrah in Makkah and visiting Madinah," the ministry said in a statement yesterday.

The ministry added that a diplomatic note was the highest official communication channel between governments.

"During the trip, the Malaysian delegation was accorded full guests of the state status.

"This included the preparation of transportation, accommodations, as well as security from the Saudi Royal Guard and protocol officers from the Royal Court."

The ministry said Saudi offi-

cialists wanted the Malaysian delegation to extend the official trip to facilitate the audiences with the royals and meetings between Anwar and top leaders of the government of the kingdom.

"The Malaysian delegation, however, had politely explained that it could not fulfil the request since the prime minister had prior engagements, including attending a breaking-of-fast event with Yang di-Pertuan Agong Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah and Raja Permaisuri Agong Tunku Azizah Aminah Maimunah Iskandariah at Istana Negara on March 25 as well as an official visit to Cambodia on March 27."

Wisma Putra also addressed criticisms over the official trip, which it described as unfair to the governments and the foreign ministries of both countries.

The ministry added that the issues raised about the trip were "speculative in nature" and deviated from the facts.

"Preparations for the trip had been made since February, which included a series of discussions between the foreign ministries of both countries to decide and fix



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim meeting Islamic Development Bank president Muhammad Sulaiman Al Jasser in Jeddah on March 23 during the former's official visit to Saudi Arabia. PIC COURTESY OF PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

the date for the official visit."

The ministry also addressed criticisms that the prime minister should not have proceeded with the visit without a fixed confirmation date, and that the trip should not be held during the first week of Ramadan.

"The ministry understood that the Saudi Arabian government adopted an open-minded approach and had in the past hosted visits from foreign dignitaries during Ramadan," it said.

The ministry said arrangements and preparations for the trip were made professionally and that they complied with the standard operating procedures

for official visits undertaken by the country's leaders abroad.

"Based on the outcome of the trip, the prime minister's official visit to Saudi Arabia reflected the importance of the diplomatic ties and cooperation between the governments of both countries."

Anwar's visit to Saudi Arabia sparked debate, particularly from the opposition, when he did not secure an audience with King Salman and the Crown Prince.

Among those who had criticised the trip were former health minister Khairy Jamaluddin, who described Anwar's official visit to Saudi Arabia as a "huge diplomatic blunder".