

Boosting ties with Saudi Arabia

PM hopes good relationship can enable M'sia to benefit from kingdom's new initiatives

JEDDAH: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim considers Saudi Arabia a key partner of Malaysia in the Middle East, following a three-day official visit to the kingdom, his first since he assumed the premiership.

Speaking at a press conference here, Anwar said he appreciated receiving the invitation to visit from the Saudi Arabian government, just months after he became Malaysia's 10th Prime Minister in November.

He said he wished to step up ties with the kingdom, even though Malaysia already enjoyed excellent relations with Saudi Arabia, including in business matters, banking and Islamic activities.

He expressed hope that this good relationship will enable Malaysia to benefit from some of Saudi Arabia's new initiatives driven by Vision 2030 introduced by Crown Prince Mohammed Salman Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

Anwar - who was accompanied by Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Dr Zambry Abdul Kadir and Communications and Digital Minister Fahmi Fadzil, among others - also met with representatives of the Saudi Arabian business community at the headquarters of the Islamic Development Bank here.

The Secretary-General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Hissein Brahim Taha, and the Secretary-General of the Muslim World League, Sheikh Dr Mohammad Abdulkarim Al-Issa, called on Anwar.

The Prime Minister and members of his delegation also performed the umrah and met with Malaysians residing in Jeddah, Mecca and Madinah to break their fast.

Anwar said Saudi Arabian leaders had asked him to extend his visit, but he had to decline due to prior engagements at home.

"I appreciate the invitation, including for an audience scheduled with King Salman Abdulaziz Al-Saud and the Crown Prince, but had to turn it down because of the scheduled iftar with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong and an official visit to Cambodia [on Monday]," he said to Bernama at the end of his tour.

He said Kuala Lumpur is also open to restarting talks on building the King Salman Centre for International Peace (KSCIP) in Malaysia.

Anwar said he did not agree with the way the centre's operations were shut down earlier as it was done without consultation with the Kingdom.

KSCIP was first proposed after the visit of King Salman to Malaysia in March 2017 and with the participation of then prime minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak in a summit in Riyadh which was attended by then

US President Donald Trump as well.

On investment, Anwar said the Saudi Arabian business community's interest in investing in Malaysia is a testament to this country's political stability.

This, he said, was expressed by the chairmen of both the National Chamber of Commerce and Jeddah Chamber of Commerce, who responded very well to his invitation to invest in Malaysia.

"Both of them not only said how pleased they were, but gave an assurance that they will immediately reciprocate.

"They were waiting for this. They know the country well, and they have been there since the 1980s and 1990s.

"But now they are waiting for this moment where there is clear stability direction and commitment to ensure the ease of doing business and rid the country of corruption, and focusing on the issue of good

governance," said Anwar, who added that the government had appealed for more constructive criticism from the Opposition, and not just statements that may cause concern among the investing public and the international community.

"But the fact remains, and I've reassured them, that the government is certainly stable.

"And in our last meeting of members of the unity government, there was a clear solid stance on the part of Pakatan Harapan and Barisan Nasional, and then followed by [Sarawak] Premier Abang Johari [Tan Sri Abang Johari Tun Openg] of Gabungan Parti Sarawak.

"The three pillars would have made a government with a strong mandate and majority in Parliament.

"But as I said, it would not stop the attempts and dreams of those craving for power without mandate and support."