

'ADVANCING NATIONAL INTEREST'

PM: WE'LL PURSUE TIES WITH CHINA. U.S.

Malaysia won't be forced to choose one side over the other, Anwar tells Berkeley audience

SAN FRANCISCO

MALAYSIA will continue to pursue robust relations with China and the United States without being pushed to choose one side over the other, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said.

He said engaging these major powers provides Malaysia with more strategic space to advance its national interests, and Putrajaya would continue to approach its relations with the superpowers pragmatically and judiciously.

"This is not a zero sum game... this is 2023. We have had enough of Cold War conflicts and rancorous exchanges.

"We say to the US and China: 'Don't force us to take sides'.

"Malaysia, just like many other countries in Asean, remains fiercely independent.

"We work to serve our country and we will continue to engage everyone."

In emphasising that the US had been a very important traditional ally, he said US investments had helped to propel Malaysia's economy as a trading nation and Putrajaya remained committed to



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its friendship with the superpower.

However, at the same time, he said China was also a neighbour that had matured in terms of its economic vibrancy.

He said Malaysia would benefit immensely by engaging China, which had remained a very reliable friend and ally. "We have not had any problems. If there are any issues, we discuss.

"Cumulatively, the US remains tops in terms of our total investments, but increasingly, China has become one of the major, the main investor in Malaysia.

"So what do you expect us to do?..You want us to take sides or to benefit by engaging both parties?"

Anwar stressed that it was important for countries like the US not to impose conditions.'

"In my experience, China does not impose conditions.

"The US sometimes feel a bit disheartened about why Malaysia, or Anwar in particular, who spent years teaching at Georgetown University, is now tilting a bit towards China.

"We are not tilting... we happen to be close to China," he said,

adding it was important for superpowers like the US to engage and listen to others.

He said this during a question-and-answer session after giving a public talk at the University of California, Berkeley, here on Tuesday afternoon.

His talk, "Superpower Rivalry and Rising Tensions in the Asia Pacific: The View from Southeast Asia", was attended by about 250 students and moderated by Distinguished Professor Dr Vinod Aggarwal.

Aggarwal had earlier asked Anwar to elaborate on his speech that touched on Malaysia, US and China relations.

In his speech, Anwar said as strategic competition intensifies between the US and China, Malaysia sees value in engaging Washington and Beijing as this provides Malaysia with more strategic space to advance its national interests.

"To my mind, this mantra applies across the board for Southeast Asia, although there will be shades of differentiation in the details."

Touching on the rising tensions in the South China Sea, he said Malaysia's position was unchanged that it strongly opposed any action undermining its territorial integrity or freedom of navigation.

"Unfettered sea lines of communication through the South China Sea are critical, as our nation would be divided without them. Nevertheless, Malaysia believes in the power of diplomacy as the best tool for conflict resolution."