

# PM: WE SHOULDN'T BE FORCED TO TAKE SIDES

Malaysia needs to maintain close ties with US and China, says Anwar

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**P**RIME Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has emphasised that Malaysia must be fiercely independent as a sovereign nation and should not be forced to choose sides in the escalation of rivalry between the United States and China.

Speaking at the Milken Institute Asia Summit 2023 here yesterday, Anwar said he wanted Malaysia to maintain close relations with both the US and China, in accordance with the current Asean policy.

"This idea that you have to be either with China or the US... no. Why should we suffer and be told what to do? I mean, we must be fiercely independent as an independent nation," he said during the special session titled "A Conversation with the Prime Minister of Malaysia", which was live streamed online.

When asked whether other Asean nations might lose out to Vietnam as it moved closer to the US due to its willingness to take a stand by siding with the Western superpower, Anwar said he was not particularly worried.

He noted that Malaysia's relations with the US government, investors and companies remained strong.

"I don't foresee much problem. President Joe Biden chose to visit Vietnam. Good for Vietnam, after it endured so much suffering in the past. It is time for the US to give additional attention to Vietnam. I have no problems about that," he said.

On the other hand, Anwar expressed his concern about the US-China rivalry, saying Asean had a role to play by engaging both China and the US, and appealing for them to reduce tensions as it was affecting countries in this region.

During the recent Asean Summit in Jakarta, he said the 10-member bloc asked both China and the US to reduce tensions in



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim speaking at the Milken Institute Asia Summit 2023 in Singapore yesterday. BERNAMA PIC

the South China Sea.

"I mentioned in front of (Chinese) Premier Li Qiang about the South China Sea.

"He responded very positively with a promise to respect the rights of countries and to negotiate and continue with effective negotiations.

"And we also appealed to the vice-president of the United States (Kamala Harris) to try and reduce these tensions because they're affecting us (Asean)."

Anwar later met his Singaporean counterpart Lee Hsien Loong.

Among the topics raised in the informal meeting was the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone.

Lee and his wife also hosted Anwar and wife Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail to tea.

"Discussions in a friendly manner... of course, we discussed matters that touch on both countries, but not officially," Anwar told the Malaysian media at the end of the visit.

"I, of course, raised other issues, including the proposed special area (in Johor) for foreign company managers working in Singapore," he added.

Anwar said the area would soon become an alternative for global company managers based in Singapore to reside.

"The area will make their journey easier... live in more comfortable conditions... a better atmosphere with facilities including international schools, golf clubs and easy travel through the Second Link."

Earlier, Anwar said Malaysia's economy will see a further boost from potential investments.

He said investors had expressed their confidence in in-

vesting in the country due to proactive steps taken by the Madani government.

Anwar, who is also finance minister, said there were initially negative perceptions that Malaysia was in political turmoil, spooking investors.

"Investors saw Malaysia as being at a crossroads. They weren't sure whether it would be stuck in the past or will move forward. But now they realise and accept the fact that the unity government has embarked on a new cause.

"They totally support the Madani Economy stance, which is not purely 'homo economicus' in sense, but also includes humanity and compassion elements.

"They have expressed interest in the Madani Economy, wanting us to elaborate on its perimeters, policies and framework.

"They realise that the unity government is here to stay for another four years and the stable governance has given them the confidence to invest in Malaysia."

Anwar added that Malaysia has a vibrant and healthy democracy in spite of the opposition.

"The opposition and its so-called 'wave' has not penetrated the southern states... this has further instilled investors' confidence in the unity government.

"Investors appreciate our new policies, industrial master plan, energy transition with the Madani Economy, including our midterm 12th Malaysia Plan."

Page 1 pic: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim exchanging views with his Singaporean counterpart Lee Hsien Loong in Singapore yesterday.