

Beijing lauds Anwar's 'China-phobia' stance

KUALA LUMPUR: China appreciates Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's stance on "China-phobia" among the US and its allies, said Minister at the Chinese Embassy in Malaysia Zheng Xuefang.

He said Anwar's remarks reflects the wish of developing countries to pursue independence and development.

"We note with appreciation the remarks by Prime Minister Anwar recently, which decried "China-phobia" among US and western allies and upheld Malaysia-China friendship.

"The development of China is an opportunity for the world rather than a threat to anyone," he said in a meeting with Bernama chairman Datuk Seri Wong Chun Wai, during a courtesy visit to the national news agency on Wednesday.

Zheng said Malaysia is a friendly neighbour to China and it would continue to work with Malaysia to elevate bilateral relations to a new level.

In an interview with *Financial*

> Chinese diplomat hails PM's recent remarks upholding bilateral friendship, regards Malaysia as 'friendly neighbour' and pledges elevation of bilateral relations

Times last month, and again during his official visit to Australia this week, Anwar stressed that Malaysia would not be dictated to by any country over its relations with China.

"We are fiercely independent," he added.

Anwar also decried the growing "China-phobia" sentiment among western nations.

Zheng also said China would work closely with Malaysia to support it in playing a greater role in Asean and international affairs, and push Asean-China relations as well as the East Asia cooperation to new heights.

Malaysia will assume the Asean chairmanship next year while it will

take over as Asean-China coordinator in July.

Zheng said China also supports the idea of the Asian Monetary Fund as well as the Asean-China-Gulf Cooperation Council trilateral summit initiative proposed by Anwar.

"We hope that Malaysia could work with all parties within Asean actively and work for the early implementation of relevant initiatives."

On another matter, Zheng said China and Malaysia are working towards a reciprocal permanent visa-free policy.

"The introduction of reciprocal visa waivers between China and Malaysia has helped to promote

tourism and people-to-people exchanges."

In December, the Malaysian and Chinese governments announced the implementation of mutual visa-free facilities for citizens of both countries for one year to further promote tourism, trade and cultural exchanges.

Malaysia has become a hotspot for Chinese tourists for years, Bernama reported.

Zheng also highlighted the achievement of economic and trade cooperation between both countries, noting that at the beginning of diplomatic relations, the total bilateral trade volume was only US\$200 million (RM940 million).

In 2002, the amount exceeded US\$10 billion (RM47 billion), and last year, it reached US\$190.24 billion (RM895 billion), making China Malaysia's largest trading partner for 15 consecutive years.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of Malaysia-China bilateral diplomatic relations and Malaysia-China Friendship Year.