

FRIENDS FOR DECADES

Anwar defends meeting with Hamas leader

TOKYO: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has defended his meeting with Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh.

Speaking at a question-and-answer session at the 29th Nikkei Forum Future of Asia here, he said he and Haniyeh had been friends for decades, and there was no reason why they should not meet.

At the meeting, Anwar said he had appealed to Haniyeh to heed calls for peace, accept a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict, and the exchange of captives.

He was responding to a question on his recent meeting with Haniyeh in Qatar.

“Is that an offence? Did I promote terrorism? No.

“I appealed because I have an advantage. What is my advantage? I know them. They consider me a friend.”

Anwar said that as a friend, he had a duty to help secure a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

On the war in Gaza, he said there was a need to view it as an unprecedented humanitarian crisis.

“Never mind the differences in terms of ideologies or bilateral relations with other states. But can we condone and turn a blind eye to the massive atrocities?”

He said the Oct 7 attack by Hamas would not erase seven decades of Palestinian oppression.

He said this was why Malaysia wanted a peaceful resolution to the conflict through the two-state solution.

“What is important is to stop the killings. Stop shooting women and children.”

He called for increased humanitarian assistance to those affected by the war.

To another question, he said that Malaysia would not be part of any “Cold War” mindset amid United States-China tensions, saying the country was “fiercely neutral”.

“Nobody, no country, should dictate (what another country does). We decide what is best for our country.”

He said the US had been a traditional ally to Malaysia since independence in 1957.

“I’ve said that cumulatively, the US is still the largest trading partner and investor in Malaysia,” he said, adding that the US continues to be very aggressive in promoting investments.

He said all the big players in the US were welcome to invest in Malaysia.

However, he said, at the same time, Malaysia recognised China’s growing economic and military might. **By Robin Augustin**