

# PM: China important to us

## Malaysia observes principle of neutrality with its neighbours

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**PETALING JAYA:** Malaysia has underscored the importance of China as a neighbour, with Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim saying that the country would focus on economic development.

"I know there has been talk (for Malaysia to downgrade relations with China), but we are not going to respond to that," said the Prime Minister.

He said that the United States had not openly requested that Putrajaya downgrade its ties with Beijing.

Given that China is an important neighbour, Anwar said it is

the duty of Asian and Asean countries to observe the principle of neutrality.

"We focus on what's best for our economic development (by) increasing trade and enhancing investments," he said when asked about Malaysia's relationship with China during an interview on *Talk to Al Jazeera* yesterday.

Trade ties between China and the United States - the world's largest economies - have been contentious, with the Biden administration recently announcing tariff increases on various Chinese imports.

Anwar acknowledged that the United States is the largest investor in Malaysia, with new invest-

ments coming in.

"There's no bias in favour of or against any country.

"(Among Asean countries), we have civil, orderly discussions and negotiations, and I think this will continue because Asean is a very strong, cohesive force," he added.

On the subject of ship-to-ship transfers of sanctioned Iranian oil off the Malaysian coast, Anwar reiterated that the United States had not provided evidence to back up claims that certain service providers in Malaysia are enabling Iran to move its oil.

"They were suspecting some companies involved in ship-to-ship transshipment in interna-

tional waters, and I said you (should) give evidence of that."

A Reuters report dated May 7 quoted a US Treasury official as saying that Iran's capacity to move its oil was reliant on service providers based in Malaysia.

The report said that "the US Treasury is increasing its focus on financing for militant groups routed through South-East Asia, including through fundraising efforts and illicit sales of Iranian oil".

Anwar also reiterated Malaysia's stand that it would not agree to unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States.

"Our position is that sanctions can only be decided by the United Nations," he said.