

# Anwar may raise South China Sea concerns

**SHANGHAI:** Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's working visit to China presents a significant opportunity for Malaysia to address key issues, particularly concerning the South China Sea.

Geostrategist and Nusantara Academy of Strategic Research senior fellow Professor Dr Azmi Hassan said the discussions could allow Malaysia to clarify its position and share the public perception of the issue with China.

"I believe that the prime minister will raise concerns over the South China Sea issue, not only in terms of diplomatic protests but also by explaining to President Xi Jinping the sentiments of Malaysians towards China," he told the *New Straits Times*.

Anwar, who is undertaking a four-day working visit to China, is expected to make a courtesy call on Xi in Beijing on Thursday.

The meeting is expected to provide an opportunity for both leaders to discuss bilateral relations between the two countries, as well as to exchange views on regional and international issues of mutual interest and concern.

Anwar is also scheduled to attend the 7th China International Import Expo (CIIE) in Shanghai tomorrow, following Malaysia's recognition as the Country of Honour.

Meanwhile, Azmi said unlike its dealings with the Philippines, China had so far opted for diplomatic notes rather than physical force with Malaysia on the South China Sea issue.

He said both nations would benefit from pursuing discussions grounded in international law, specifically the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which supports Malaysia's claim to its Exclusive Economic Zone.

He also said the courtesy call could serve as a private forum for Anwar to address the domestic political dynamics at play.

"China, much like Malaysia, values face-saving measures, and discussions on sensitive issues like this should occur privately to protect diplomatic relations.

"Anwar's task will be to communicate public sentiment and pursue negotiations that respect Malaysia's sovereignty, while maintaining a respectful bilateral relationship with China," he said.

Anwar had said Malaysia was committed to peacefully resolving disputes in the South China Sea based on international law, including UNCLOS.