

# 'Malaysia prioritises Asean despite closer ties with China'

**BEIJING:** Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has reaffirmed Malaysia's commitment to Asean as its primary regional partner, even as diplomatic ties with China continue to expand.

Addressing concerns that Malaysia may be leaning more towards China, Anwar stressed that Asean remains Malaysia's closest ally.

"In recent years, our diplomatic relations with China have grown, and some might ask if we are leaning more towards China than other partners.

"However, our commitment is, first and foremost, to Asean, our close neighbour, where our relationships are the strongest.

"Apart from Asean, we also maintain strong ties with China, Japan, Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand, and for me, we will continue engaging positively with all nations," he said during an exit press conference with the Malaysian media at the end of his work trip to China yesterday.

Anwar also emphasised that the close relationship between Malaysia and China did not mean that Malaysia was aligning itself with any particular party, including in matters of leadership, investment and trade.

He added that aside from trade matters, China's stance was often more aligned with Malaysia's than with many other countries, particularly regarding the situation in Gaza.

We take a moderate approach, meaning a balanced stance, with good relations.

"China is also very welcoming and regards us as a friend, so areas like BRICS, bilateral cooperation, memorandum of understanding and trade receive their attention.

"Many people suggest that we are taking sides, but that's not the case. There are many issues we discuss, and on the topic of Gaza, China's position is closer to ours than that of many other countries."

Anwar also said he would personally invite Chinese President Xi Jinping to attend the 2025 Asean Summit.

"In terms of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (summit), I will leave it to him (to decide).

"However, I would strongly urge him to come (for the Asean Summit) as he considers Malaysia a great friend," he said.

Earlier, during a public lecture at Peking University, Anwar said Malaysia was aware of its responsibilities as it prepared to assume the role of Asean chair next year.

He said the complexities of the global landscape required Asean to take on new roles and responsibilities.

He said this was due to Asean's evolution into a region of 671 million people, with a combined gross domestic product of US\$3.8 trillion, making it the fifth-largest economy in the world.