

PUBLIC LECTURE AT PEKING UNIVERSITY

Anwar pushes for greater inclusivity in region

BEIJING: On his third trip to China since taking office, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim made it clear that Malaysia has more than its own interest at heart in pushing for a more inclusive region.

While the trip also saw meetings with Chinese investors who pledged to import some RM3.2 billion worth of Malaysian goods, Anwar signalled the country's intent to play a greater role at a regional level as it prepares to chair Asean next year.

In his public lecture at Peking University, Anwar said Malaysia was committed to strengthening cooperation and unity within the Asean bloc while upholding the principle of centrality.

The Asean principle seeks to ensure that no country, no matter how big, can dictate another nation's actions.

At the same time, Anwar said Malaysia would ensure all voices are heard and that decisions were made collectively, in line with the Asean chairmanship theme: Inclusivity and Sustainability.

Throughout the four-day trip, Anwar spoke on the need for Asean to play a greater role in a

complex global landscape, more so to the region's evolution into an economic powerhouse, home to 671 million people and a combined gross domestic product of US\$3.8 trillion.

Beyond issues within Asean, Anwar also spoke on the need for the bloc to work more closely with China and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

In his meeting with Chinese Premier Li Qiang early in the trip, Anwar said Malaysia and China should work closely to help grow the Southeast Asian economy.

Later in his public lecture, Anwar dove deeper into the topic, saying China had made significant progress in digitalisation, artificial intelligence and green energy — areas which Asean viewed as essential for long-term resilience.

He said in this respect, Asean and China shared a commitment to innovation and emerging technologies.

Significantly, in pushing for stronger Asean-China ties, Anwar announced that he would personally invite Chinese President Xi Jinping, who he met during this



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim preparing to depart to Kuala Lumpur from Beijing on Thursday, wrapping up his four-day working visit to China. BERNAMA PIC

trip, to attend the 2025 Asean Summit.

The prime minister also reiterated Malaysia's intention to initiate a trilateral forum involving Asean, China and the GCC that would "build a bridge" linking three regions and facilitate the forging of stronger economic, cultural and strategic ties.

In his exit interview, Anwar also addressed arguably the biggest pain point in Asean-China ties: the South China Sea.

Anwar said the conflict stemming from overlapping territorial claims in the increasingly militarised sea could be resolved without conflict.

He said Malaysia's stance on bilateral or multilateral discussions has always been clear, though Asean could also serve as a mechanism for engagements with China.

Presently, Malaysia and its Asean allies are negotiating a Code of Conduct framework with

China aimed at preventing conflict and keeping the peace in the South China Sea.

Though it was apparent that Anwar plans for Malaysia to play a key role in facilitating greater Asean-China ties, he said there was no question about Malaysia's commitment to the bloc.

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