

Malaysia firm in defending freedom of South China Sea

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia is firm in defending the freedom of the South China Sea in accordance with the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

"The centrality of Asean's approach is through negotiation and dialogue, but Malaysia will not waver from our claims and stance regarding Malaysian-owned areas.

"That is why Petronas exploration activities, including in the Kasawari area, continue. Although this has been raised by China, we said we will proceed but have never closed the door for discussions with any country," he said in the

Dewan Rakyat yesterday.

He was replying to a supplementary question from Datuk Seri Takiyuddin Hassan (PN-Kota Bharu) on Malaysia's strategy to use diplomatic channels as the Asean chair in 2025 to resolve overlapping claims in the South China Sea.

Anwar said Malaysia would also continue to reprimand and protest if the country's waters are used as a passage without permission.

"Malaysia has issues with all neighbouring countries such as Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore and Brunei.

"That is why we disagree when border

disputes are only referred to one country, for example, China, when in fact, we have the same issue (with other countries), and this problem does not affect diplomatic relations, trade relations or close friendships with our neighbours."

Meanwhile, Anwar said when Malaysia takes on the Asean chairmanship in 2025, there will be, for the first time, a conference of the 10 member countries together with the Gulf Cooperation Council, which comprises Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman, as well as China.

"This will only take place next year, marking

a beginning for Asean, in addition to continuing Asean's meetings with dialogue partners such as China, Japan, Korea, India, Australia, New Zealand, the European Union and the United States."

He said apart from the main event in Kuala Lumpur, Asean officials' meetings and several visits would also be held in all states to ensure that no state is left out in celebrating Malaysia as the Asean chair in 2025.

Anwar said besides focusing on diplomatic discussions, the Asean conference would also serve as a platform to introduce Malaysia as the best investment destination. - Bernama