

"Malaysians abroad must have equal voting rights'

> Matter raised with EC to enable citizens living overseas to cast ballots just as those at home: Anwar

BRUSSELS: Malaysians living abroad must have the same right to vote in elections as those at home, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

He said he had raised the issue of postal voting for overseas Malaysians with the Election Commission (EC).

"The EC is an independent body but I have raised this matter with them. They must give opportunity to every single Malaysian to vote," he said during a gathering with about 200 Malaysians here.

Anwar, who arrived on Sunday for a two-day working visit to Belgium, was responding when told about difficulties Malaysians abroad faced during elections.

"I even said don't go through the embassy (for the voting process). Use some mechanism so people can come and vote, even if it means adding extra funds for this," he said, adding that the EC was receptive to his suggestion.

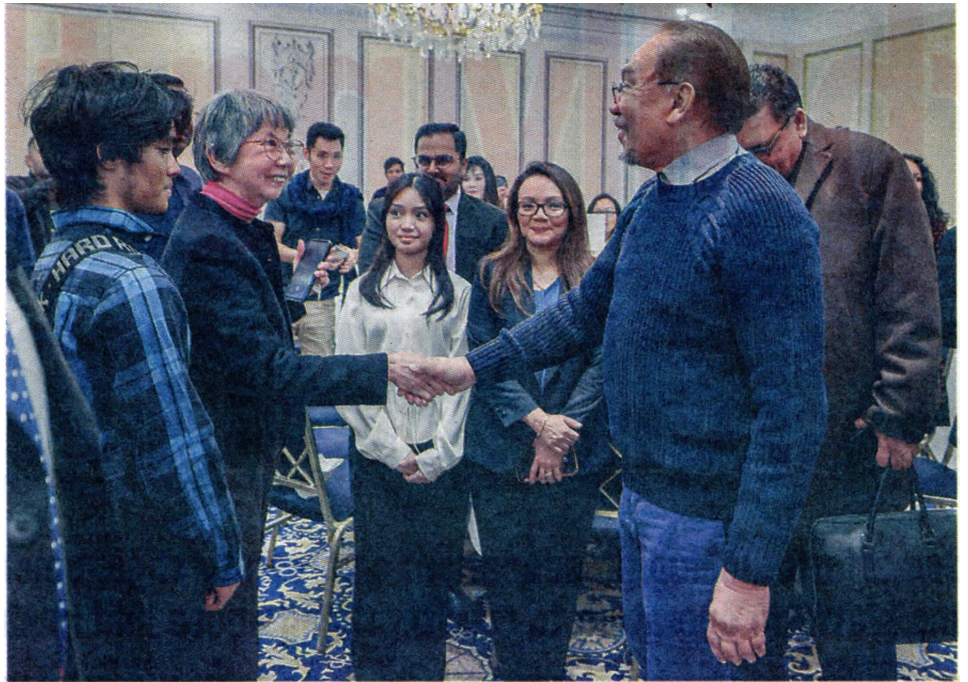
On whether the Malaysian government is giving priority to green technology and forestation, Anwar said it is one of the main agendas of the present administration.

"Europe has destroyed all (its) forests, don't tell us to learn from them. Our forest (cover) is at 54% now (and) in fact, our green lungs have increased. Last year, we planted one million trees as part of our forestation campaign."

Anwar said Malaysia and its Asean partners are focusing on the Asean power grid, which not only generates hydropower but also energy from solar and other renewable sources.

To enhance the standard of education in Malaysia, Anwar said the government is working in tandem with the industry, which means new disciplines and technologies must be acquired.

"We have 140,000 foreign students in our



Anwar meeting the Malaysian diaspora in Brussels yesterday. - BERNAMAPIC

universities. I have visited many developing countries and their leaders want to send their students and officers to learn from us, in fields like semiconductors."

Anwar, who is on his maiden visit to Belgium since assuming office in November 2022, is expected to address issues on trade, the Middle East and the Russia-Ukraine crisis during his meeting with the leadership of Belgium and the EU.

He is accompanied by Investment, Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Tengku Zafrul Abdul Aziz, Higher Education Minister Dauk Seri Dr Zambry Abdul Kadir and Plantation and Commodities Minister Datuk Seri Johari Abdul Ghani.

Malaysia's ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg and the EU Datuk Mohd Khalid Abbasi Abdul Razak said a positive development on the decision to restart negotiations on the stalled Malaysia-European

Union Free Trade Agreement is expected during the premier's visit.

Negotiations for the agreement started in 2010 but stalled in 2012, following Malaysia's reservations over the EU's palm oil procurement policies, subsidies and sustainability clauses, Bernama reported.

Anwar is scheduled to meet the caretaker Prime Minister of Belgium Alexander De Croo to discuss bilateral relations.

He will then meet EU top officials, beginning with the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy High Representative and European Commission Vice-President Kaja Kallas and European Council President Antonio Costa to discuss ways to deepen Malaysia-EU ties and regional cooperation.

Anwar will wrap up his visit by delivering a keynote speech titled "Bridging Regions: Strengthening Southeast Asia-European Resilience", at the College of Europe in Bruges.