

Platform to court six Gulf nations

Anwar wants to leverage on Asean-GCC Summit to forge better ties

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PUTRAJAYA: The Asean-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Summit next Tuesday is a platform to create new multilateral cooperation, and Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim wants to leverage it to forge better ties with other countries.

The Prime Minister said in his recent discussions with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman, and the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, he was informed they want to be closer with China, notwithstanding the GCC's close ties with the United States.

"They want to be closer with China too. In my discussions with them, that seemed to be the sentiment.

"We thought that we should use this occasion to try to build up some projects that involve some countries, sub-regional if not regional, so that we can work together," said Anwar.

He also said China is giving its support to the special Asean-GCC Summit as its Premier Li Qiang is

set to attend.

At the same time, Anwar said the six Gulf nations under the GCC are economically vibrant in the Middle East and they have close ties with the United States.

"The GCC has relatively closer links with the United States and I think we should make use of it," he said during a media briefing at Seri Perdana on Wednesday night.

The GCC consists of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and Oman.

These leaders are set to arrive in Kuala Lumpur on Monday on the eve of the special Asean-GCC Summit.

Meanwhile, Anwar said Putrajaya believes in maintaining close ties with the United States and China which is beneficial to the country, adding that no major economies should impose any conditions on Malaysia's economic direction.

Anwar revealed that former US secretary of state Antony Blinken cautioned him during the Asean Summit in Laos last November that Malaysia was getting too



close with China.

"I said Secretary Blinken, we are closer (geographically) to China, we can't help it, it is there, closer.

"You have to give me a reason why we cannot be close.

"So, I was very frank, in no way I intend to provoke him or sort, but our dependence on the United States is clear, because trade and investment is huge.

"But, what I can't accept is the tendency to dictate. You must allow for countries to decide in their best interest," he said.

Anwar also said border disputes were not confined only to the South China Sea with China, as Malaysia also has ongoing border talks with neighbouring countries.

"We have problems with Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei and Indonesia. Why not bring these issues up?

"But despite this problem with Singapore, our relations are still at its best," he said, pointing to the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ) agreements, which were inked between Putrajaya and Singapore earlier this year.

The Prime Minister said the intense rivalry between the United States and China is sometimes overly exaggerated, as both countries would make pragmatic considerations before making big decisions.

"President Donald Trump will make a final decision that guarantees economic vibrancy of the United States and, similarly, China

would want to continue that sort of economic engagement with the United States, because it is a huge market and both have huge investments either way.

"So, I'm cautiously optimistic, we take the position that we have to depend on both to benefit us," he added.

Meanwhile, Anwar said he is likely to raise the issue of Gaza during the Asean Leaders Retreat on Monday.

"It is sickening. While negotiations are taking place, the bombings continue. As I have said, we have actually lost our humanity in a world full of contradictions.

"Malaysia has done all it could, though some are hoping for us to do more.

"But, within Asean, we have a consensus to push for a ceasefire. When I chair the Asean Leaders Retreat next Monday, there is a big possibility that I may touch on this issue," he added.

Recently, Britain, Canada and France threatened to impose sanctions on Israel if it does not stop a renewed military offensive in Gaza and lift aid restrictions.