

**Welcoming Remarks by YBhg. Tan Sri Rastam Mohd Isa,  
Chairman and Chief Executive of ISIS Malaysia  
for the panel discussion on “Searching for a Malaysia-ROK  
Comprehensive Strategic Partnership” and the Launching of  
the Malaysia Scholars on Korea (MASK) Network,  
Westin I, Westin Kuala Lumpur, 5 December 2017**

His Excellency Dr Yu Hyun-seok,  
Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Malaysia, a longstanding  
friend of ISIS Malaysia.

Yang Berbahagia Dato' Ganeson Sivagurunathan,  
Undersecretary for East Asia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen.

Good morning.

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this event which comprises two parts. First we will have a Panel Discussion on “Searching for a Malaysia-Republic of Korea Comprehensive Strategic Partnership”. This will be followed by the launching of the Malaysia Scholars on Korea (MASK) Network. This event would not be possible without the steadfast and unstinting support of Ambassador Yu and the Embassy of Republic of Korea (ROK) in Malaysia.

This panel discussion is held at a timely moment, especially considering that Malaysia-ROK relations are quickly approaching its sixth decade. Established in 1960, the relations between Malaysia and the ROK can be characterised as one of mutual benefits, and interdependent cooperation.

It is to be noted that the ROK extended recognition to then Malaya only two days after the new country’s independence in September 1957. From there, the late father of the current Prime Minister, then Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak led a five-man delegation to Seoul in November 1962 to sign the first trade agreement between the two countries. This high level visit was

reciprocated by Premier Chung Il-kwon six months later, where the first cultural agreement was signed.

The early decades of the relationship were characterised by a period of great economic growth within the two countries. Throughout the 1970s, Malaysia's exports to the ROK increased six times, while ROK's exports to Malaysia dramatically increased by more than eighty times. In the 1980s, under former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Malaysia adopted the Look East Policy – whereby the former Prime Minister felt that Malaysia could learn from the impressive growth experience of the ROK, Japan and Taiwan.

The ROK became an ASEAN dialogue partner in 1991. It was Malaysia that was the main supporter of Seoul's application. Also, interestingly enough, Korean companies were involved in the construction of not only the current tallest buildings in Malaysia, the Petronas Twin Towers, but also the tallest building in Kuala Lumpur until 1995 – Menara Maybank.

On top of that, the ROK has been a good partner in terms of Malaysia's development. Its construction firm, Hyundai Engineering and Construction Company Ltd together with our

United Engineers Malaysia Berhad constructed the 8.4kilometer bridge linking Gelugor in Penang Island with the mainland in Seberang Perai.

This bridge, until 2014, was the longest bridge in Malaysia and the only road link between the peninsula mainland and the island. The construction of the bridge had successfully dispersed traffic from the ferry terminals, contributing to the development success of Penang and its industrial zones.

Relations between Malaysia and the ROK continue to be at high levels today. In 2016, total trade between the two countries stood at 59.4billion ringgit, with Malaysian imports from the ROK at 36.6billion ringgit and exports to the ROK at 22.7billion ringgit. Investment relations have also been good. Korean investments in Malaysia now amount to RM1.5billion. Samsung, for instance, has made big investments. Ten years ago the bulk of Samsung microwave ovens destined for the world market were produced here. Now Samsung, LG, Hyundai, Kia and Hankook are Korean brands Malaysians are very familiar with.

The ROK – through its Korean wave or '*hallyu*' – has now become a household name in Malaysia. Conversations on the ROK today

are for things ranging from Korea as a tourism destination, its technology through companies such as Samsung, cars, dramas, K-pop, culture, beauty products, and food. I have recently discovered a halal Korean restaurant certified by JAKIM in Ampang.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

The relations between these two countries have come a long way to be where it is now. It is my hope that this panel discussion would act as a starting point to consider the case for a Malaysia-Republic of Korea comprehensive strategic partnership. It is important that we continue engaging our partners to share knowledge and exchange ideas to further the already close ties between Malaysia and the ROK.

To this end, ISIS Malaysia signed a Memorandum of Understanding signed with the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Malaysia in November 2016. The purpose of the MOU is to promote research activities, facilitate information and knowledge exchanges, and foster better understanding and cooperation between the Republic of Korea and Malaysia.

After the Panel Discussion, and with the unwavering support of the Embassy of the ROK in Malaysia, we will be launching the Malaysia Scholars on Korea, or MASK, Network. The MASK Network will act as a focal point for scholars and researchers in the two respective countries. As the Malaysian focal point, the MASK Network will serve as a directory for stakeholders and interested parties to engage with scholars in Malaysia who conduct research on Korea.

I understand that the MASK Network presently has 13 members – coming from renowned universities in Malaysia such as the University of Malaya, the National University of Malaysia (UKM), the International Islamic University Malaysia, and researchers from ISIS Malaysia. The backgrounds of these scholars and researchers range from interest in and expertise on Republic of Korea foreign policy, North Korean issues, inter-Korean relations, Malaysia-ROK trade relations, Korean culture and the Korean language.

The list of these members is in no way completed, and I hope that many more scholars interested in the Korean peninsula, or East Asia, would participate as members of the MASK Network. Moving forward, the MASK Network can hold lectures,

conferences, forums and seminars whereby the respective MASK Network members will be given a platform to share research outcomes and to exchange ideas and opinions with wider audiences.

It is my sincere hope that with the Panel Discussion today and the launch of the MASK Network, we will be able to set the momentum going into the New Year for greater cooperation and closer ties between scholars and policymakers of Malaysia and the ROK, and between the people of the two countries. I trust this will not be the first and last of this kind of event, and with the support from the Embassy of the ROK, ISIS Malaysia would endeavour to organise more of such events in the future.

I wish you all a fruitful discussion, and a successful launch.

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