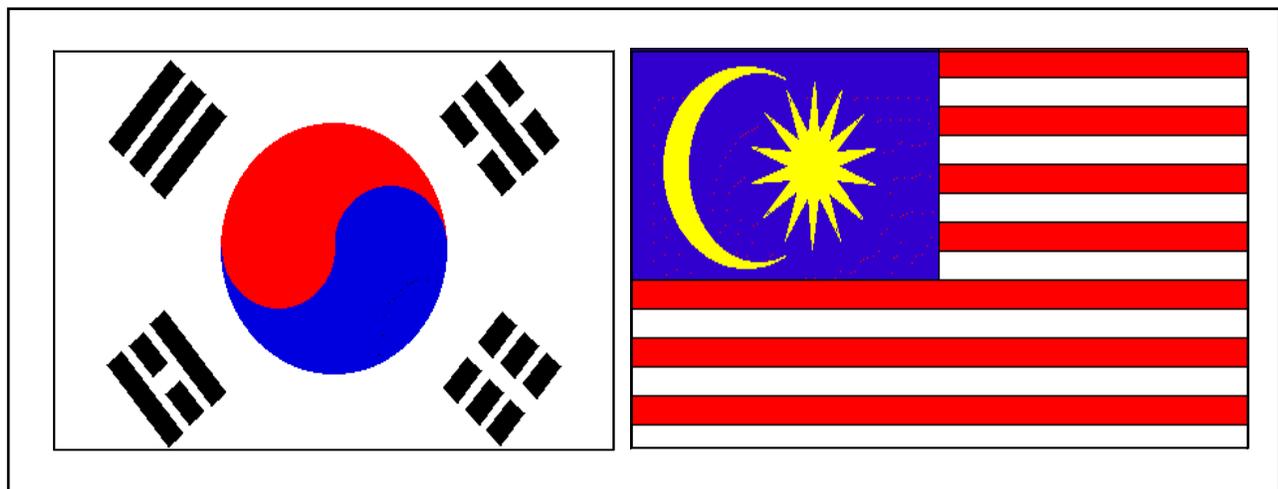




Korea-Malaysia Roundtable: Taking Stock and Moving Forward

November 2009, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia



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- Nation-Building;
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- The administering of the Perdana Scholarship/Fellowship Programme.

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Political and Diplomatic Ties

The First Session of the Korea-Malaysia Roundtable held on November 13, 2009, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, was jointly-chaired by Tan Sri Mohamed Jawhar Hassan, then Chairman & CEO of ISIS Malaysia, and His Excellency Ambassador Yim Sung-joon, President of the Korea Foundation. The two speakers of the session were His Excellency Mr. Yang Bong-ryull, the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Malaysia and Dato' M. Santhanaban, Malaysia's former Ambassador to South Korea. **Keith Leong**, Researcher at ISIS Malaysia, reports.



(From left) M. Santhanaban, Yim Sung-joon, Mohamed Jawhar Hassan, Yang Bong-ryull

Ambassador Yang said that he believed that the Roundtable came at the right time. The year 2010 would mark the 50th Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and the Republic of Korea. He believed it would be appropriate to reflect on the key aspects of the two nations' shared pasts, as well as on the positive elements and important tasks that the future could hold.

Yang went on to review political and diplomatic relations between Malaysia and South Korea over the past 50 years. He defined the period as an 'era of a mutually beneficial partnership' between the two countries, amidst unprecedented economic growth. He felt that the substantive aspects of the partnership, especially in the economic dimension, began with former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir's Look East Policy

in 1981, with Korea as one of the 'Four Asian Tigers' and with Malaysia as a follower.

The numbers speak for themselves. Trade volume between Korea and Malaysia, which amounted to RM 460 million in 1979, increased to as much as US\$ 15.7 billion in 2008. Korea is also Malaysia's 8th largest investment partner; Korea's investment in Malaysia since last year has amounted to a whopping US\$ 3 billion.

The construction sector is also an important area of economic ties. For instance, Korean companies had by February 2009 won orders for 180 projects worth some US\$ 8 billion. We should also not forget the human element behind all these figures: President Lee Myung-bak was CEO of the Hyundai Construction Company when it successfully bid for the Penang Bridge project in 1981, while Samsung Engineering helped build one of the iconic Petronas Twin Towers.

Presently, economic cooperation between Malaysia and Korea has evolved into more complex and value-added areas. These include the financial market (i.e. Korean banks opening representative offices in Kuala Lumpur, and strategic alliances between Daewoo Securities and CIMB), tourism (Berjaya's development of the US\$ 1.8 billion Yerae Recreational Resort) and high-tech industry (the collaboration between Samsung Electronics and YTL in developing the Wimax service in Malaysia).

Also significant is the cultural and people-to-people exchanges between Malaysia and Korea. The most visible manifestation of this is of course tourism, which has increased exponentially. In 1998 for instance, the number of Koreans visiting Malaysia was 21,700. By 2008,

this figure had increased to 270,000 -- by more than 12 times in a decade. Conversely, in 2008, over 83,000 Malaysians visited Korea, a figure that was twice that ten years ago. Also, 'Korean Wave' dramas such as 'Winter Sonata' and 'Jewel in the Palace,' as well as Korean animation and music have become increasingly popular in Malaysia.

Asia will become the centre of the global economy and Asean will play a central role in driving greater integration in the continent via the East Asia movement

Turning to the future, Yang posited that the Korea-Malaysia partnership, particularly in terms of politics and diplomacy, would grow more comprehensive and cooperative, based on three points. Firstly, both countries have successfully laid a firmer foundation for the future, and share the 21st century's predominant values, namely peace, democracy and the market economy. Also, both governments have worked in tandem in regional and international institutions like the UN and Asean. Yang noted for instance Malaysia's unequivocal and consistent stance that the Korean Peninsula be denuclearised, and that it be peaceful and stable. Malaysia has also expressed grave concern over North Korea's nuclear ambitions and has urged it to return to the Six-Party talks.

Secondly, Yang felt that international and regional trends are likely to reinforce ties between Malaysia and Korea. Asia will become the centre of the global economy and Asean will play a central role in driving greater integration in

the continent via the East Asia movement. Asean's influence will increase enormously as it becomes a single community by 2015, and the Asean-ROK FTA, as well as the Asean+3 and EAS processes will increase trade as well as people-to-people exchanges.

Third, the policy initiatives announced by the governments of Korea and Malaysia will pave the way for closer ties. Yang cited President Lee Myung-bak's 'New Asia Initiative,' which seeks to lift overall relations with Asian countries, including Malaysia, through concrete, tailor-made policy measures. Korea has also committed to operationalising the US\$120 billion Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralisation (CMIM) fund by the end of the year. It continues to actively participate in the development of the Asian Bond Market, to increase the capital of the ADB and improve regional response mechanisms to financial crises.

On Malaysia's part, Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak's foreign policy focus has been on strengthening relations with Northeast Asian countries. For instance, he attended the Asean-ROK Summit in Korea in April 2009, and visited China in June. Najib has also expressed his wish for more senior official exchanges between the ROK and Malaysia to further boost relations. In line with this, several Malaysian Cabinet Ministers have visited Korea. Najib and Lee will also exchange visits to mark the 50th Anniversary of bilateral relations.

Yang also noted that both Korea and Malaysia have made sustainable development a national priority: Korea with its 'Low-Carbon and Green-Growth Policy' and Malaysia with its endeavours to develop itself into a biotechnology hub via its 'National Biotechnology Policy' as well

as its 'Malaysian Green Technology Policy.' All of these indicate that the two countries share similar goals and place great importance on shared ties.

Yang called for the institutionalising of Korea-Malaysia relations, which he felt were essential to consolidate the benefits from the close ties. He was disappointed that there were few bodies that could allow representatives from Korean and Malaysian private and public sectors to network, as well as exchange views -- something which he believed was vital.

He praised the work of bodies like the Korea-Malaysia Business Council and the Korea Chamber of Commerce in Malaysia. He called on Malaysian companies to support and join in the work of these bodies. Yang also called for the establishment of regular channels of exchange at a government-to-government level, in the form of, for instance, an 'Energy and Resources Cooperation Committee' or a 'Science and Technology Cooperation Committee.'

...the way for closer ties. Yang cited President Lee Myung-bak's 'New Asia Initiative,' which seeks to lift overall relations with Asian countries, including Malaysia, through concrete, tailor-made policy measures

Such exchanges will facilitate communication and help develop mutual interests. Koreans and Malaysians regard each other highly and it would be a shame for these

opportunities to be wasted. Yang ended by promising to give full support to any initiative that would strengthen ties between the two countries.

Dato Santhanabab declared that bilateral cooperation between Korea and Malaysia over the last five decades existed in virtually every sphere of human endeavour. These bilateral relations have been free from controversy due to shrewd management by both Kuala Lumpur and Seoul.

...bilateral cooperation between Korea and Malaysia over the last five decades existed in virtually every sphere of human endeavour

When ties were established in the late 1950s, both Korea and Malaysia were, in Santhanabab's words, 'backwaters.' Malaya, as it was known then, was still in a state of emergency, while Korea not only had to deal with the threat of the DPRK but was also dependent on external aid for development. ROK, in fact lagged behind the North in areas like per capita income, and industry, although that situation has been reversed today and South Korea's per capita income outstrips that of their Communist counterparts by some 40 times.

The year 1961 was a turning point for both nations. The Emergency ended in Malaya and Tunku Abdul Rahman, then Prime Minister, put forward his 'Malaysia' proposal. It was also the year that General Park Chung-Hee seized power and put South Korea on a path of economic empowerment. Both Tunku and Park

played an important role in shaping Korea-Malaysian bilateral relations.

Santhanabab said both nations also shared the view that the looming threat of Communism would best be neutralised by economic development, although their foreign policies became more pragmatic over time. The fact that the ROK began to participate in the Merdeka Soccer Tournament from 1957 when Tunku Abdul Rahman was President of the Asian Football Confederation also helped to boost ties.

A watershed year was 1962, when South Korea established its diplomatic mission in Kuala Lumpur. Its first Ambassador was the famous and controversial General Choi Hong-hi, who helped develop the sport of taekwondo. He founded the International Taekwondo Federation (ITF) and did much to popularise this martial art in Malaysia. He was succeeded by Professor Chu Khu-Yah, who later served as Foreign Minister and Prime Minister to President Park Chung-hee, and eventually, as President in his own right, after Park's assassination.

Malaysia, on the other hand, established its Seoul embassy in 1964, becoming the third Asean country after the Philippines and Thailand (who were members of Seato) to do so. Malaysia's first two Ambassadors were Dato' Mohd Ismail Mohd Yusof and Bahadun Haji Hassan, both of whom were from the Tunku's home state of Kedah. Santhanabab posited that the political and diplomatic leadership that these personalities provided were vital in influencing the course of bilateral cooperation between Korea and Malaysia.

The successors of both Tunku and Park continued to build upon the foundation laid down

in the 1950s and 1960s, contributing to enhanced bilateral relations. Exchanges of visits at all levels were initiated and intensified. For instance, Malaysia's kings have been visiting the ROK regularly since 1969.

Malaysia's 1982 Look East Policy brought Korea further to the centre of Malaysian foreign policy. Such was the dynamic nature of relations between the two nations that the ties not only attained a high level of functionality, facilitation and sophistication, but were also strongly influenced by regionalism and globalisation.

Bilateral agreements, including those on trade, defence, tourism, visa-free facilities, airlines services and cultural cooperation further strengthened relations, as did the implementation of the Asean-ROK FTA from 2006-2009. All these signify that Malaysia or any other Asean country cannot stand aloof from the forces of globalisation.

The presence of Korean expatriates in Malaysia, and vice-versa as well as the two-way flow of tourists are also a sign of closer people-to-people ties. Trade, investment and business cooperation are all steadily increasing, and in all these areas ICT has been integral. To Santhanaban, these developments demonstrate the greater interdependence between Korea and Malaysia.

Santhanaban admitted that there were some weaknesses and ironies in Korea-Malaysia relations. For example, Proton cars are not sold in Korea, there are only a few Malaysian restaurants there, and not many Malaysian businessmen operating in Korea compared to expatriates.

More needs to be done to benefit from the strengths of both countries. He pointed to

Korea's use of sound scholarship and innovation to drive its economic growth and its superior universities that have hosted Nobel Prize winners. He felt that Malaysia should send senior scientists and technologists to such institutions, rather than limit such exchanges to students alone.

He also felt that Malaysia should learn ship-building technology from Korea rather than simply buying the vessels, and Korean chaebols should be willing to facilitate such transfers of technology. Korea on the other hand, being a homogenous society, could benefit from Malaysia's multicultural experiences.

In conclusion Santhanaban stated that a reunified Korea was not a distant prospect. Such a united and resurgent entity would, like Germany, rise as an economic and political middle power and could very well become the world's sixth or seventh largest economy. Malaysia is well-positioned to benefit from such a prospect and thus needs to play an active part via more joint ventures and other forms of cooperation.

Trade, investment and business cooperation are all steadily increasing, and in all these areas ICT has been integral

Trade and Investment Ties

Session Two of the Roundtable was chaired by Tan Sri Mohamed Jawhar Hassan, then Chairman and CEO of ISIS Malaysia, and Ambassador Yim Sung-joon, President of the Korea Foundation. The lead speakers were Dr Park Bun Soon, Senior Fellow of Samsung Economic Research Institute (SERI) South Korea, and Datuk Dr Rebecca Fatima Sta Maria, Deputy Secretary General (Trade), Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) Malaysia. ISIS Analyst **Terence Too** reports.



(From left) Park Bun Soon, Ambassador Yim Sung-joon, Mohamed Jawhar Hassan, Rebecca Fatima Sta Maria

Dr Park Bun Soon presented a Korean perspective on the trade and investment ties between Korea and Malaysia. He identified a number of similarities between the economies of the two nations, particularly with regard to macroeconomic indicators. He noted that both countries experienced rapid economic growth up to the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997-98, and both

countries were badly hit by the event. Though growth rates in both have largely recovered, gross fixed capital formation fell sharply after the Crisis, and has not recovered to pre-Crisis levels. Korea has however exhibited slightly higher numbers compared to Malaysia since the Asian Crisis.

Additionally, despite calls for East Asian countries to strengthen their domestic economies and domestic demand, as well as to reduce their dependence on external markets, exports of goods and services as a percentage of GDP has risen in both countries since the Asian Crisis. Thus they will face new challenges from the current global economic crisis, given their dependence on exports and the sharp contractions in their main export markets, including Japan, China, EU and the US.

In terms of differences, Park noted first that Korea has benefited from its relatively good human resources while Malaysia has taken advantage of its abundant natural resources. As a consequence, Malaysia has been able to better manage its foreign reserves directly after the Asian Crisis. Second, Korea's market size was larger than Malaysia's in terms of population, which allowed Korean entrepreneurs to enter into the manufacturing sector. Third, investment in the manufacturing sector was led by indigenous entrepreneurs, allowing Korea to achieve great technological progress.

However, in Malaysia, MNCs played a significant role in investment in the manufacturing sector. Finally, in terms of investment, Park noted that Malaysia has accumulated a large current account surplus, exceeding 15 per cent of GDP, which indicated there have been few, or insufficient investment opportunities for Malaysia since the Asian Crisis.

In examining these similarities and differences Park focused on trade and investment cooperation between Korea and Malaysia. He noted that while Korea's exports to Malaysia have largely remained stagnant over the 2000s, imports from Malaysia have increased

significantly over this period. The cause of the major problem in trade between the two countries, he concluded, was the fact that Korean products were being squeezed out in Malaysia.

The first reason for the poor performance of Korean products in Malaysia over the last decade, he said, was poor Korean investments in Malaysia. While Korean investments were vigorous over the 1990s, they contracted sharply during the Asian Crisis and never recovered to their former levels until 2007. Park noted that the current trends of Korean investment and trade in the Malaysian manufacturing sector has created a demand for Korean exports.

Park noted that the top five Korean exports to Malaysia, comprising largely of intermediate electronics goods, accounted for more than 50 per cent of Korean exports in 2008, indicating that Korean exports are highly dependent on the Malaysian electronics industry

The second reason was Malaysia's industrial structure, which was heavily concentrated in the electronics industry. Malaysia has been participating in the international division of labour of the electronics industry, but its industrial structure was rigid and could not be easily diversified. China had begun producing and exporting manufactured products in direct competition with Korean manufacturers and, as

such, the economic link between Korea and Malaysia would depend heavily on whether Malaysia has an edge over Chinese manufacturers.

Park noted that the top five Korean exports to Malaysia, comprising largely of intermediate electronics goods, accounted for more than 50 per cent of Korean exports in 2008, indicating that Korean exports are highly dependent on the Malaysian electronics industry. Korea's major exports are competing intensively with exports from Japan and China. Electronics is the most important export to Malaysia not just for Korea but for Japan as well; meanwhile, China's exports of electronics into Malaysia increased by 278% between 2004-2008.

On the way forward, Park noted that both opportunities and difficulties existed. First he proposed that the Korea-Asean FTA should be more extensively pursued; both countries should more fully commit themselves to the agreement. While Malaysia is believed to be protecting its industrial sectors to an extent, both countries should strive to achieve trade liberalisation in order to expand their exports.

Second, recently concluded FTA agreements between Japan-Asean and China-Asean may have blunted the original expectations of the potential benefits of trade creation that the Korea-Asean FTA could bring about. To address this, Park proposed a bilateral FTA between Malaysia and Korea, similar to that between Malaysia and Japan. There should also be further promotion of Korean investment into Malaysia. Noting that trade and investment ties are not independent but rather build upon one another, such as the situation during the mid-1990s, Park proposed that further efforts be

made to inform Korean investors of the opportunities and merits of investing in Malaysia.

Third, Malaysia should open up its markets to allow imports to enter more freely. Malaysia's high current account surplus indicates that it has been saving too much instead of investing or raising its private consumption. One measure to boost consumption would be to make the distribution of income more equal, while another would be for MNCs to raise wage rates. While investment inflows may be reduced in the short term, this situation can stimulate investment in non-trade measures by local businesses. In the process, Malaysia's dependence on exports can be reduced and the production chain from MNCs can be reorganised to use more advanced technologies as they adjust to the new environment.

...to reduce transaction costs and enhance economic cooperation among East Asian countries, creating an East Asian free trade area based on the Asean +3 would be the solution

Fourth, Malaysia must address its market size. One way would be to complete its integration into the Asean FTA. The other would be to upgrade the transport infrastructure, to integrate the Malaysian peninsula more fully with its neighbours. Even after full realisation of the Asean FTA, transport infrastructure must be of a high quality so as to reduce transport costs between Malaysia and neighbouring countries such as Vietnam and the Philippines. This will improve Malaysia's position as a market, making

it more appealing to foreign investors.

Finally, efforts to integrate with the East Asian region is vital. Advanced economies are not expected to recover quickly and the threat of rising protectionism due to domestic political pressure exists. Over the past decade, the Chinese market was important for other East Asian exports; however, as the end market for Chinese goods are in the US and EU, continued exports to China would face difficulties.

As such, to reduce transaction costs and enhance economic cooperation among East Asian countries, creating an East Asian free trade area based on the Asean +3 would be the solution. The realisation of the EAFTA would lead to a virtuous circle where rising trade would lead to rising consumption and investment. Korea should play a leading role in Northeast Asia, and Malaysia in Southeast Asia, while harmonising their actions through a close relationship.

Socio-cultural and Academic Ties

Session Three was co-chaired by Tan Sri Mohamed Jawhar Hassan, then Chairman and CEO of ISIS Malaysia, and Ambassador Yim Sung-joon, President of the Korea Foundation. The lead speakers were Dr Hong Suk Joon, Professor, Department of Cultural Anthropology, Mokpo National University, Korea, and Dr Tang Siew Mun, Consultant, ISIS Malaysia. ISIS researcher **HW Woo** reports.



(From left) Tang Siew Mun, Yim Sung-joon, Mohamed Jawhar Hassan, Hong Suk Joon

Six major issues arose in the presentations and discussions during this session. Among them were:

1. Education in Malaysia;
2. Popular culture;
3. Migration;
4. Tourism in Malaysia;
5. Academic exchanges and programmes; and
6. Cultural exchanges.

Education in Malaysia

The first issue raised was education in Malaysia, and the popularity of the country among Korean students as a destination for language learning. Statistics show Malaysia is the third most popular destination after the Philippines and Singapore for English language learning by Korean students. About 2,000 of them reside in the country while studying for English proficiency tests (e.g. IELTS and TOEFL) in special language centres or colleges.

Malaysia's comparative advantage in educational cost, quality and environment can be attributed to several factors. Amongst these are the cost of living in Malaysia, which is among the lowest in the region, reasonable and affordable tuition fees, and the high standard of education offered. Most English language learning centres in Malaysia have trained professional instructors with extensive experience in preparing international proficiency tests. Malaysia also offers a suitable platform for learning and practicing English and other languages, due to its demographic make-up, which is that of a multiracial and multilingual society. A Muslim majority population gives the added advantage of night life being less of a distraction.

Popular culture

The issue of Korea's popular culture is seen in the impact of the Korean Wave, which refers to the popularity of Korean films, dramas and music in Malaysia and other countries. The enabling factor for this phenomenon in Malaysia is the high percentage of total airtime set aside for Korean programmes and dramas, with seven hours on private channels and one hour on the public channel (RTM). These programmes are translated into Cantonese and Mandarin. The local Chinese community's fascination with Korean culture, food and fashion has had spill-over effects in the larger economy with increases in the purchase of Korean consumer products, tourism to Korea, and the increasing number of students taking up Korean Studies programmes.

The local Chinese community's fascination with Korean culture, food and fashion has had spill-over effects in the larger economy...

Migration

The existence of the Korean diaspora in Malaysia and its impact on the domestic economy was highlighted under the issue of migration. From 2005-2007, the number of Koreans in Malaysia tripled to 15,000 people making it the 16th largest community of overseas Koreans, the 5th largest in Southeast Asia. The majority consisted of expatriates working in South Korean companies and of international students concentrated in Kota Kinabalu in Sabah, in Kuala Lumpur, and in Ampang, Selangor. As a market for Korean overseas real estate investment, Malaysia is the second most popular destination after the US, with over 700 applications by Koreans each month. This helps promote the Malaysia My Second Home (MM2H) programme.

Tourism in Malaysia

Tourism is one of the biggest sources of foreign exchange in Malaysia. In 2008, the country had 22.05 million registered tourists, an increase of 5.1 per cent compared to 2007. Statistically, the number of Korean visitors to Malaysia increased by 19 per cent to 267,461 people from 2007. As this comprised only 1.21 per cent of total inbound tourists, an increase to 280,000 was targeted for 2009. Several likely contributing reasons for the increase were pointed out.

Malaysia possesses a variety of attractive tourist destinations. In Sabah there is Mount Kinabalu, the tallest peak in Southeast Asia and Sipadan Island, a world class diving spot. Kuala Lumpur, the capital city has the Twin Towers, one of the tallest buildings in the world. There are direct flights to both destinations from Seoul. The country is also a living showcase of multicultural heritage and the traditions of Asia, befitting its

tagline of 'Truly Asia.' It was granted Unesco World Heritage status for the historic, colonial towns of Penang and Malacca, along the Straits of Malacca.

Academic exchanges and programmes

On the issue of academic exchanges and programmes, the discussion centred on past policies, current challenges and the possibility of future collaborations. Malaysia has sent over 2,700 students to South Korea for industrial and technical training since the inception of the Look East Policy. Meanwhile, the Korean Foundation provided Malaysians support for graduate studies and research, and provided post-doctoral fellowships for Korean Studies. Malaysia also established a Chair in Malay Studies at Korea's Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in April 2008.

Malaysia has sent over 2,700 students to South Korea for industrial and technical training since the inception of the Look East Policy

Despite such initiatives, there are three main challenges still facing Malaysians intending to study in Korea. These are:

- High tuition fees;
- Language barrier (most courses are taught in Korean, although the use of English in teaching is gradually increasing); and
- A lack of short-term study programmes for academics.

Several suggestions were proposed as remedies, based on existing and new initiatives. Among them was leveraging on the uptrend of educational level and quality in East Asia to develop an academic network encompassing a broader region. This could be accomplished through the selection of joint research topics on Malaysia-Korea, using indigenously sourced documents from both sides, based on examples of existing Malaysia-China and Malaysia-Japan collaborative research such as:

- Chinese-sourced documents on research topics such as the migration of Chinese from China to Malaysia; and
- The use of Japanese-sourced documents on research topics such as the era of the Japanese occupation in Malaysia.

Such joint research between Malaysian and Korean academics should also encompass different knowledge areas. They should emulate the Japanese Rompaku exchange programme which encourages short-term study by academics. The establishment of a Korean Chair in Malaysian universities, and the setting-up of departments or divisions on Korean Studies were other suggestions, along with the expansion of Korean language programmes such as the Test of Proficiency in the Korean language (TOPIK) at the National University of Malaysia (UKM).

Cultural exchange

The final issue raised was that of cultural exchanges, and suggestions on the future trajectory of bilateral socio-cultural and academic ties. These include the following:

- The growing popularity of Korean dramas and singers extend beyond the local Malaysian Chinese community to the local

Malays, but translation is only provided in Mandarin;

- Regular cultural events and festivals should be organised by Koreans staying in Malaysia, such as those organised by the Japanese in Malaysia, so as to promote Korean culture among Malaysians;
- Twin-cities programmes should be conducted between the capitals and provincial cities of both countries;
- Establishing an Asean-ROK Cooperation Fund for cultural exchange;
- Exploring the possibility of setting up more offices of the Korean Foundation in Southeast Asian states, including in Malaysia, as currently there is only one such office in Vietnam;
- Conducting outreach programmes and educational exchanges at various levels, especially among the youths, students of secondary schools, and tertiary students;
- Better use of Malaysian students who have studied in Korea to deepen contacts between the people through public diplomacy; and
- Bridging the gap between Malay and Korean culture in terms of intercultural communications and the conducting of public debates.

their standard. For example, in the 1960s, Malaysia used to beat South Korea in soccer, but now has been overtaken by them. It was also suggested that to advance by building on its current achievements, the Koreans should do more in promoting sports as an industry, with the aid of an agency such as Jetro in Japan.

One of the most insightful comments was on the need for Malaysians to emulate the Koreans' sporting prowess. It was noted that it was the fighting spirit, endurance and resilience of Korean men and women that led to their rise and domination in sports such as golf, soccer etc. Many Korean players are now playing in the English soccer premier leagues. On the contrary, Malaysian sports have been facing a decline in



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