

China signals bigger world role



Chinese honour guards prepare for the arrival of Zambian President Edgar Lungu and Chinese President Xi Jinping during a welcome ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on March 30, 2015. Lungu was on visit to China and to attend the Boao Forum for Asia. AFP



'BELT AND ROAD' INITIATIVES: Beijing's new policy pronouncements merit closer scrutiny and appropriate responses from Malaysia

THE 2015 Boao Forum for Asia, held in March, clearly demonstrated China's will and ambition to claim its right in shaping the future of Asia and the world. The forum itself was a grand festival combining diplomatic parleys, business interaction, intellectual discourse, interfaith dialogue, media engagements and cultural exchanges. The Chinese government and the forum organisers spared no efforts in rolling out an extravagant show and lavish hospitality, supported by a well-oiled organisation.

Some 2,000 foreign leaders and officials, business tycoons, delegates and guests were present. The BFA normally brings alive the town of Boao, a tourist destination tucked along the eastern shore of Hainan island. Leaders from several countries, including Malaysia's Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Razak, attended the official opening of the forum inaugurated by President Xi Jinping.

The president focused his keynote address on the forum's theme of "Asia's New Future: Towards a Community of Common Destiny", using the occasion to consolidate his earlier policy pronouncements and initiatives. He reiterated China's view of Asia and the world in the present regional and global political, economic and strategic environment and China's readiness to play a greater role in keeping with its current superpower status.

The message that came from Xi and Chinese ministers, officials and scholars who spoke at BFA was clear: China is now prepared to shoulder its responsibilities in promoting and maintaining global peace and pursuing common development, based on a new type of international relations, a win-win approach, equality among nations, a community of common destiny, mutual respect, consensus building and accommodation of each other's comfort levels, respect for different social systems, development paths, core interests and major concerns and the pursuit of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security.

The president spoke about his earlier proposals on the establishment of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road for the 21st century, now simply referred to as the "Belt and Road" initiative. The long anticipated document outlining this vision was issued later that afternoon. The wide international support for another major initiative from China on the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) also received a lot of attention at Boao, especially with major European economies joining in as founding members before the deadline of March 31.

Besides the opening ceremony, there were a series of panel discussions, seminars, media events, business meetings and religious dialogues; 77 in total. Numerous side meetings were held. Bob Hawke, former Prime Minister of Australia and a member of the Board of BFA was quoted as saying that the aim of making Boao the Davos of Asia has certainly been achieved.

The Chinese policy pronouncements at Boao merit closer examination and analysis as well as appropriate responses here in Malaysia, in particular on the "Belt and Road" initiative, the AIIB, community of common destiny and regional security architecture. Foreign Minister Wang Yi spoke at the

session on the Asean community and reiterated China's wish to pursue a dual approach in resolving issues relating to the South China Sea. As chairman of Asean, Malaysia has to note this and work out the necessary responses.

The Shanghai Institute of International Studies (SIIS) and the Beijing-based China Foreign Affairs University (CFAU) kindly hosted my participation as a speaker at the forum. But Murphy's Law really came down hard on me when I arrived in Boao. First, I could not get my RFID conference and identification pass upon arrival because a provincial government official had apparently taken it earlier and nobody could trace her. Second, upon checking in at the hotel, I was confronted with a room that was hot, dank and in total darkness because someone had turned off the main switch to the floor. Third, since there was no room service and the restaurant only served breakfast, I ended up having instant noodles for dinner.

I got my pass the next day with the help of my hosts from Shanghai and Beijing, but not until the opening ceremony was over and after Xi and our prime minister had made their speeches.

The mystery surrounding my missing pass was not quite explained to me. The episode was for me frustrating yet funny, since I could not imagine such a slip-up could occur amidst the excellent organisation of the forum. But I guess I can say that like Stephen Sondheim's Broadway musical, "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum", the 2015 Boao Forum closed with a happy ending. The Chinese themselves must have been extremely happy with the outcome.

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