

PM 29th APR Dinner Speech

1 June 2015

Your Majesty HRH Sultan Nazrin Muizzuddin Shah, Sultan of Perak Darul Ridzuan

Your Excellency Ambassador Yong Chanthalangsy,
Chairperson, ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS)

Yang Berbahagia Tan Sri Rastam Mohd Isa,
Chairman and Chief Executive,
Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia

Excellencies,

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am delighted to be here this evening. To those of you who have just arrived from abroad, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you to Kuala Lumpur and to the 29th Asia-Pacific Roundtable. I am aware that for many of you, this is not the first time you have participated in this Roundtable. To those of you: welcome back.
2. The history and reputation of the APR speak for themselves. Over the years, this Roundtable has proven to be a significant feature of Track Two policy discussions in this region. I wish to commend ISIS Malaysia and the ASEAN-ISIS network for convening this annual gathering. It has never been more important for thought-leaders from Asia Pacific and beyond to deliberate on the issues and developments affecting the region.
3. The insights and analyses coming from conferences such as this will help governments make important decisions and formulate long-term policies, initiatives and programmes.
4. Over the next two days, I encourage you to engage in frank and robust discussions about the key challenges facing the Asia Pacific region.
5. Many of these challenges need to be addressed at a regional level. For example, I am deeply concerned by the plight of the Rohingya migrants trying to reach our shores. I was particularly shocked by the discovery of graves of alleged victims of people smugglers along the Malaysia-Thailand border. We must find and punish those responsible. The migrant issue should be resolved at ASEAN level with assistance from other countries and international bodies as needed – only if countries work in unison can we defeat this trade in human misery.
6. Another pressing challenge, of course, is the need to consolidate regional stability and to promote positive, predictable and peaceful relations among and between nations, especially the major powers.

PM 29th APR Dinner Speech

1 June 2015

7. We need to make common cause, maximise the opportunities for collaboration, and carefully manage any potential sources of tensions.
8. Stability is one of those words that can mean different things to different people. Standard definitions may convey a sense of permanence. We are so used to mentioning “stability” in conjunction with words like “preserve” and “maintain.” A desire for stability could therefore be easily confused with a demand that everything remains the same, with familiarity prized and change treated with caution.
9. But the history of Asia Pacific shows that it has always been a region characterised by profound change. In recent decades the region has witnessed the most dramatic improvements in living standards in modern human history. And along with these improvements have come shifts in mind-sets and expectations.
10. Thirty years ago, the average annual per capita income of developing nations in East Asia and the Pacific was US\$440. Today, that number is closer to US\$3,600. Malaysia’s own per capita GDP has more than doubled from about US\$4,000 to US\$10,500 over the last decade.
11. The most dramatic growth has taken place in China, where real incomes have risen over twelve-fold in the past three decades. As a result, over half a billion people have been raised out of extreme poverty within a single generation.
12. This phenomenon certainly represents a giant leap for mankind. It has given rise to a genuine desire amongst the peoples of this region to see that their nations are accorded their rightful roles and status in the world – to be treated with respect, and with dignity.
13. These are on-going changes in regional expectations and ambitions present some very interesting perspectives. Are they inconsistent with stability? Or could they be positive contributions to stability? Similarly, the on-going shifts in the distribution of power and influence in the Asia Pacific should not necessarily be seen as inherently threatening.
14. In facing these challenging changes, we have to ask whether the structures of regional and global governance designed for a different era should remain static, or whether new structures and institutions should be more appropriate to ensure stability for the future.
15. Asia Pacific needs to come to terms with the rapid shifts in its strategic environment. We need to realise that regional stability does not hinge on wishing away or seeking to prevent these changes. In fact, failure to properly accommodate and respond to them could create the conditions that could lead to instability.

Your Majesty,

Ladies and gentlemen,

PM 29th APR Dinner Speech

1 June 2015

16. The current trajectory towards global multipolarity is set to continue in the coming decades. The United States will remain a power of major consequence in Asia Pacific, despite claims by some that we are witnessing the twilight of America's role and interest in the region.
17. At the same time, other major powers – China, India and Japan – will increasingly want to shape outcomes in ways that reflect their preferences and interests. Other key regional players, including ASEAN, will also have ample opportunity to shape the environment of the Asia Pacific. We should recognise that all can make significant contributions towards peace, security and stability.
18. I am confident that this transition towards an evolving strategic landscape, where power and influence are more evenly distributed, can be managed peacefully. Yes, we will have to account for a greater multiplicity of interests. Some of those interests will coincide, while others will not.
19. But, given the spirit of cooperation, dialogue and community-building that exists in Asia Pacific, we should be able to strike a healthy balance in the spirit of mutual benefit and coexistence.
20. Deeper economic integration is key to this.
21. While governments play a major role in promoting integration, let us not underestimate the transformative effects of what businesses and people can achieve. Nothing can produce a stronger and more enduring foundation for good relations between nations than understanding, empathy and mutual-identification at the people-to-people level.
22. These are among the reasons why my government is a strong proponent and supporter of initiatives such as ASEAN's Post-2015 Connectivity Agenda. This is also why Malaysia, in principle, welcomes the plans for further cooperation from ASEAN's dialogue partners, including China's One Belt, One Road initiative and India's Act East Asia policy.
23. In matters where our interests diverge, we need to adopt a firm reliance on the basic and fundamental rules and principles that govern inter-state relations. Whether we are managing disputes over access to resources, over territorial or jurisdictional rights, or any other issues that impinge on the interests of any nation, the rule of law must reign supreme.
24. This must be true in established domains such as land, sea, air and outer space, and in the emergent one of cyberspace, where many interesting debates are continuing to unfold.
25. Supplementing this respect for international law should be a strong commitment towards cooperation, mutual respect, and the recognition that our destinies as nations are ultimately linked, regionally and globally.

PM 29th APR Dinner Speech

1 June 2015

Ladies and gentlemen,

26. This year is a meaningful year for ASEAN, and especially so for Malaysia as we are the Chair of ASEAN. By the end of 2015, it is our duty to establish the ASEAN Community. We have come a long way since 1967.
27. ASEAN today is a community of 10 member states united in diversity. We still have differing political systems and different levels of development, and our peoples are marked by a rich cultural, ethnic and linguistic mix. But this diversity is also potentially our greatest strength.
28. It is in recognition of ASEAN's combined growing citizenry and market of more than 630 million that Malaysia has chosen for our chairmanship the theme, "Our People, Our Community, Our Vision." A people-centred ASEAN is one that will prosper with high standards of governance, sustainable development, respect for human rights, and women's empowerment.
29. There is much work to be done, of course – even and especially beyond 2015. But this is ASEAN's time.
30. ASEAN is the fourth-largest exporting bloc in the world with a combined GDP of US\$2.5 trillion. By 2020, that figure is projected to increase to US\$4 trillion. We comprise the third-largest workforce globally, and our youthful demographic is another positive indicator of our continued growth.
31. Prospects look promising, too, for the wider Asia Pacific. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific estimates that 60% of the world's youth between the ages of 15 and 24 reside in this region. Youth unemployment in the Asia Pacific is also among the lowest in the world, at 11%.
32. The young are an incredibly spirited, vibrant, and versatile part of our nations. They will form the future. The technological innovations of recent decades are second nature to them. These innovations have helped to transform our region and bring prosperity to our peoples.
33. But there is a flipside to this, one that we must be wary, too. Extremists are also adapting and exploiting technology in sophisticated ways for purposes of propaganda and recruiting terrorists. Let me be clear. We reject their messages of violence and extremism just as we reject terrorism, violence and extremism in all forms.
34. This region has for centuries been enriched by the assimilation and integration of different peoples, cultures, and traditions. We must therefore proactively propagate a narrative of moderation, tolerance, and peace. This is not just a counter-narrative to the one spread by the extremists. It is in fact our heritage.

PM 29th APR Dinner Speech

1 June 2015

35. This fight against extremism must be waged in the mind, articulated in speech, and amplified in cyberspace so that the battle zones of today do not become breeding grounds for misguided ideologies to be exported abroad. In this regard, technology can be our ally, and we must use it skilfully to uphold our own peaceful, moderate traditions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

36. Material achievements are but one measurement of success. In our eagerness to connect, progress and prosper, we must also be mindful of our responsibilities to the environment and what we leave for future generations.

37. We have witnessed for ourselves how natural disasters have increased in frequency and intensity across the world. This certainly calls for greater international cooperation in disaster management. Climate change has also amplified the problem of resource depletion.

38. Water, energy and land – three crucial resources for development and human well-being – are under increasing strain not only due to climate change, but also because of price volatility and population growth. At current rates, demand for energy and water will have grown by 40% by 2030, and by 50% for food. This risks a new and dangerous scramble for resources.

39. Our aim should be to prevent and pre-empt such an escalation. This means that energy, land management, and water-resource planning should be coordinated – seamlessly rather than in isolation. And we in Asia Pacific can certainly lead the way in managing our resources with sustainability and stability foremost in our minds.

Ladies and gentlemen,

40. The challenges for Asia Pacific are many. But so are the opportunities. In my interactions with other heads of government, it is clear to me that there is a great genuine desire to harness the great potential of our region and address any difficulties in a collaborative, accommodating and constructive way.

41. But this determination should not be confined to those at the leadership level. We all share a collective responsibility to ensure our words, deeds and actions contribute towards the region's stability, security and prosperity.

42. Whether as officials who make important decisions, or as scholars and journalists who deliberate on and frame the discourse on key issues, you have the ability and obligation to make a profound and lasting contribution to a positive future for the Asia-Pacific region.

43. I would therefore like to encourage you all, the participants of this 29th Asia-Pacific Roundtable, to adopt a balanced and constructive approach towards the issues to be discussed over the next couple of days.

PM 29th APR Dinner Speech

1 June 2015

44. It is easy to highlight what and where the problems are. It is a lot more difficult to arrive at practical and realistic solutions. I urge you to take that difficult road, and, in the process, make a real difference to the Asia Pacific and to the world.

45. It is with great pleasure that I now declare the 29th Asia-Pacific Roundtable open. May you all have a very successful conference.

Thank you.