



DINNER ADDRESS BY

THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, MALAYSIA

**DATO' SERI UTAMA HAJI MOHAMAD BIN HAJI
HASAN**

**AT THE WELCOMING DINNER OF THE 37TH
ASIA-PACIFIC ROUNDTABLE (APR)**

HILTON KUALA LUMPUR, 4 JUNE 2024

His Excellency, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary-General of ASEAN,

Yang Berbahagia, Datuk Professor Dr Mohd Faiz Abdullah, Chairman of ISIS Malaysia,

Heads and members of the ASEAN-ISIS Network,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Let me start by congratulating ISIS Malaysia, and its partners, for their continued dedication to sustaining meaningful Track 2 engagements, in Malaysia and Southeast Asia. In the scheme of Track 2 platforms in this region, the Asia-Pacific Roundtable stands out. The organisers have successfully carved a niche, and an esteemed reputation, for this Roundtable, as one of the key conferences of its kind in this region.

2. Over the past six months or so, I have had the privilege of visiting numerous countries, in the course of my duties as Foreign Minister. Drawing from the

discourses that I have had, a question that is often posed to me and my colleagues at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is Malaysia's approach to foreign policy, especially under this Unity Government.

3. Our fundamental principles, which have been built on sound values and practical considerations, remain consistent. We are steadfast in our commitment to non-alignment, peaceful resolution of disputes and international law, while advocating for mutually beneficial relations. Malaysia also upholds multilateralism, which plays a crucial part in achieving our foreign policy objectives.

4. That said, however, it is not all business as usual. As many of you know, this government has introduced the Malaysia MADANI policy framework, which aims to transform Malaysia into not just a modern and advanced society, but one that is value-driven. These MADANI values have fortified our foreign policy approach.

5. We are fortunate to have a very proactive and globally savvy Prime Minister, who articulates Malaysia's foreign policy positions, and actively seeks to foster meaningful collaborations, with foreign partners. We are also committed to drawing in more investments, particularly in high-value, high-growth industries, to the country.

6. As a trading nation, Malaysia strives to create a business-friendly environment. The introduction of economy-driven initiatives, such as the MADANI Economy framework, the New Industrial Master Plan (NIMP) 2030 and the National Energy Transition Roadmap (NETR), serves this purpose.

7. Driven by its economic interest, this aspect of Malaysia's foreign policy has had a significant impact on the way we conduct business in the future. Given the current landscape of intense competition, and the strategic use of trade and investment, I am optimistic that our diplomats, will seize the opportunities that are emerging before us, and actively pursue economic

diplomacy initiatives, to support our trade and supply chain advantages.

8. Another frequent topic is Malaysia's upcoming chairing of ASEAN next year. This is something many of you will be touching on over the next two days.

9. While I won't go into the specifics, one thing is for sure: Malaysia's ASEAN Chairmanship, will firmly uphold our national and foreign policy values, as well as our commitment to the regional Organisation, that we jointly founded, fifty-seven years ago.

10. ASEAN and Southeast Asia have made remarkable progress on all fronts. Our Community is now maturing; processes within the pillars are being streamlined, and long-term goals will soon be in place. The ASEAN Community Vision 2045, which Malaysia has been entrusted to coordinate as the upcoming Chair, will mark another seminal moment for ASEAN.

11. True, some challenges remain. But ASEAN has never been without challenges. Its very foundation was spurred by a desire to overcome strife and challenges of the time. ASEAN has continued to overcome these challenges, together. We have grown, together.

12. A key factor in enabling this progress, is our emphasis on centrality, and perhaps more importantly, cohesion. Together with our External Partners, I believe a central and cohesive ASEAN can exert a positive influence, in mitigating the adverse effects of major power rivalry, in the Asia Pacific.

Ladies and gentlemen,

13. My final point for the evening, is on key conflicts in our region and beyond. Two of them stand out: Myanmar and Palestine. Undeniably, the unfolding events beyond our borders have never been more important, for our security and stability.

14. The civil war in Myanmar remains, one of the most critical and pressing issues for ASEAN to manage. Let me be frank: we can, and should, do better. ASEAN and its Member States must get our house in order, and strive for a workable consensus. We must enhance the effectiveness, of humanitarian aid distribution, and engage all stakeholders, to prepare for political reconciliation.

15. We cannot ignore developments in Myanmar, as its internal dynamics have regional consequences. Malaysia, in particular, is facing the effects from displaced peoples, who have been forced to flee, or denied a chance to return. To reiterate a constant point made by Prime Minister Dato' Seri Anwar, non-interference is not an excuse for indifference.

16. On Palestine, Malaysia has consistently pointed out, that the root causes of the crisis must be addressed. The events that led to the ongoing destruction of Gaza, did not occur suddenly on October 7 last year, nor did they happen in a vacuum.

17. Palestinians have been subjected to almost eighty years of subjugation. The last few months have shown us that the government in Tel Aviv, left unchecked, has no qualms about committing barbaric and inhuman acts of atrocity.

18. Israel's friends and allies must persuade its government, to immediately end its aggression in Gaza. Malaysia stands firm in our position, that the Palestinians deserve their own independent and sovereign state, through the two-state solution, based on pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. This might seem a small possibility amid current circumstances, but it remains the only viable solution to decades of injustice.

Ladies and gentlemen,

19. The tragedies in Myanmar and Palestine might seem rather gloomy notes to end a dinner address with. There are many others, including the ongoing civil war in Sudan, and the war in Ukraine.

20. Yet these are the difficult realities that we must contend with. Too often, it appears that the international mechanisms, and the international laws and norms that underpin them, continue to crack under the strain of these pressures.

21. The view is that chaos will continue unabated, that the system is too dysfunctional, or that major powers are too vested in their own rivalries, at the expense of more inclusive and multilateral approaches. That, of course, is the pessimistic viewpoint.

22. But the optimists have a different take: they continue to see hope amid the challenges of this *inter-reg-num*. It is my strong conviction that there is cause for optimism on a global scale. These difficult circumstances that we find ourselves in, can be overcome, together, collectively.

23. Decades of multilateralism and cooperation cannot be simply swept aside. It will not benefit anyone – the developed nations of this world, the Global South, even the major powers of China and the United States. We all have too much to lose.

24. In conclusion, let me reiterate my congratulations to ISIS Malaysia and its partners for convening the 37th edition of the Asia-Pacific Roundtable. I wish to thank you for this honour and my best wishes to all of you for a productive roundtable.

Thank you.