



# THIRTY2

ASIA-PACIFIC ROUNDTABLE

7 | 8 | 9 MAY 2018 | KUALA LUMPUR | MALAYSIA



**DISRUPTION:  
PEOPLE. TECHNOLOGY.  
POWER. SECURITY**



SPONSORS



The Embassy of  
The People's Republic of China  
in Malaysia



Australian Government

---

# THE 32ND ASIA-PACIFIC ROUNDTABLE: A REPORT

---

## **Introduction**

The Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia has hosted the Asia-Pacific Roundtable (APR) series since its launch in 1987 to promote trust and confidence in the Asia-Pacific region. As a Track Two forum, the APR brings together think tanks, academics, media representatives and senior government officials acting in their personal capacity to engage in candid dialogue regarding major security challenges confronting the region. The APR has gained a reputation as the premier Track Two forum in the region, being ranked in recent years by the University of Pennsylvania's Global Go To Think Tank Index as one of the world's top-20 think tank conferences.

The APR is a project supported by the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS), with ISIS Malaysia as the anchor institution convening the conference. This year's conference saw the attendance of scholars, government officials, policy makers and opinion leaders from across the Americas, Asia Pacific, Europe and West Asia.

Tan Sri Rastam Mohd Isa, Chairman and Chief Executive of ISIS Malaysia, and U Khin Maung Lynn, Joint Secretary of Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies, delivered the welcoming and opening remarks respectively at the opening of the 32nd APR in Kuala Lumpur on 7th May 2018.

## THE PLENARY & CONCURRENT SESSIONS

---

Monday, 7 May 2018	
<b>Plenary 1</b>	<b>Politics in Southeast Asia: Change or Status Quo</b>
<b>Instigator</b>	<p><b>Dr Michael Vatikiotis</b>            Asia Regional Director            Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue            Singapore</p>
<b>Speakers</b>	<p><b>Ambassador Pou Sothirak</b>            Executive Director            Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP)            Cambodia</p> <p><b>Dr Thitinan Pongsudhirak</b>            Director            Institute of Security and International Studies (ISIS)            Thailand</p> <p><b>Professor Dr Aileen SP Baviera</b>            President            Asia Pacific Pathways to Progress            The Philippines</p>

This session explored the themes of disruption and continuity as facilitated by elections and the democratic processes in several Southeast Asian states.

Dr Thitinan argued that Thailand's political process was best described by continuity. Thailand's elected governments did not always prove to be sustainable as the military had staged successful coups at various stages in history. This intermittent shift between the elected government and military junta is a durable pattern that has characterised the country's political nature, at least in the past 85 years. However, he posited that new parties that leveraged on technological advancement and social media may leave more than a dent in this trend as Thailand approaches its next election, due to be held in 2019.

Professor Baviera maintained that President Duterte signified a departure from tradition not only through his eccentric governance style, but also the controversial policies he had introduced. These include the war on drugs, the push for federalism and the perceived drawdown from the country's alignment with the United States. Furthermore, she contended that the citizens' source of insecurity was rooted in their anxiety over Duterte's capability to deliver his promises.

Ambassador Pou questioned the theories of the inevitability of democratic transition and of elections as a check-and-balance tool. These modern theories are progressively challenged in Southeast Asia as nations suffer a decline in democratisation processes. He asserted that authoritarian leaders consider elections as an end in itself, using it as a way to justify his or her unchallenged power as they only enter the contest when a victory is assured. Unfortunately, the longer these authoritarian leaders stay in power, according to him, the harder it is for liberal democracy to prevail in these nations.

<b>Special Panel</b>	<b>Foreign Policy in the Digital Age</b>
<b>Instigator</b>	<b>Mr Bunn Nagara</b> Senior Fellow Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia
<b>Speakers</b>	<p><b>Mr Siddharth Varadarajan</b> Founding Editor <i>The Wire</i> India</p> <p><b>Associate Professor Dr Farish Ahmad-Noor</b> Coordinator PhD Programme, Graduate Programmes Office S Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) Nanyang Technological University (NTU) Singapore</p> <p><b>YM Raja Dato' Nushirwan Zainal Abidin</b> Deputy Secretary General (Bilateral Affairs) Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia</p>

According to Dr Farish, the perception that everyone had the right to participate in digital media should raise concerns in the sphere of foreign policy – it could be hijacked by popular opinions. The fact that social media is readily accessible indicates that there is an open invitation for anyone to participate, even if one is politically or economically illiterate. He stressed that foreign policy was not for everyone just because they have access to the Internet.

Mr Siddharth went on to expand that, as of today, social media had created an avenue for critics to put pressure on policy makers towards various issues, such as refugees, or controversial statements made by actors like President Trump or Daesh, who effectively used social media for their own gain. The question remained whether people are using it in a positive way or as a tool to legitimise policy.

Speaking from experience, Raja Nushirwan stated that trust was essential in diplomacy – people must take responsibility when expressing their opinions. To him, the most important thing was information, but the lubricant that made diplomacy work was trust, not legislation. We are now living in a more globalised and interdependent world, and so the two phenomena – social media and interdependence – complement one another.

<b>Tuesday, 8 May 2018</b>	
<b>Concurrent 1</b>	<b>Strategic Update: Northeast Asia</b>
<b>Instigator</b>	<p><b>Dr Lee Jaehyon</b> Senior Fellow ASEAN and Oceania Studies Program The Asan Institute Republic of Korea</p>
<b>Speakers</b>	<p><b>Dr Hoo Chiew-Ping</b> Senior Lecturer Strategic Studies and International Relations Programme National University of Malaysia (UKM) Malaysia</p> <p><b>Dr Yuan Chong</b> Deputy Director Institute of Japanese Studies China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) China</p> <p><b>Professor Tosh Minohara</b> Professor of US-Japan Relations Kobe University Japan</p>

Discussions focused on two main points – the situation in the Korean Peninsula and relations between China, Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK). Points on the Korean Peninsula featured optimistic and pessimistic views. Optimism stemmed from Kim Jong-un’s willingness to engage in dialogue on the nuclear programme and economic cooperation. The pessimistic camp countered by listing doubt on differences in definition of denuclearisation and the strategic positioning of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) as a nuclear power. Additionally, the credibility of actors in the Korean Peninsula was raised: (i) China was less trusted by DPRK and ROK, and (ii) the unpredictability of the Trump administration’s negotiating stance.

Issues on trilateral relations highlighted Japan where the state of Japan’s domestic economy and Prime Minister Abe’s drive to shore up his popularity gave them the impetus to increase their foreign policy engagements, such as participation in the Quad and warming ties with China. Secondly, the US government’s conflation of economic and foreign policy – leveraging US military presence in Japan for increased access to the market – can provide common interest for greater cooperation, such as realising the trilateral summit in the near future. However, while space for cooperation is wide, unresolved issues will continue to present obstacles.

<b>Concurrent 2</b>	<b>Strategic Update: West Asia</b>
<b>Instigator</b>	<b>Mr Sholto Byrnes</b> Senior Fellow Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia
<b>Speakers</b>	<b>Dr Morteza Damanpak Jami</b> Vice President Research and Studies The Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS) Iran  <b>Dr James Dorsey</b> Senior Fellow S Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) Nanyang Technological University (NTU) Singapore

Dr Jami highlighted that West Asia had historically been characterised by its common cultural values and peaceful coexistence. Unfortunately, part of the region today suffers from violence, ethnic conflict and rising risks of terrorism due to varying reasons. These include foreign intervention, proxy wars, miscalculation and uncooperative behaviour of some regional actors.

However, there were positive developments in terms of efforts to increase and deepen economic cooperation and integration. These included organisations which redefined their respective mandates to capitalise on emerging trends, such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). According to Dr Jami, these would eventually lead to greater regional interconnectivity and increased mobility throughout the region.

Dr Dorsey spoke on the significance of Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's plans to introduce reform in the country to the region. This push for reform was to create a Saudi-led regional order that would be based on an upgraded, 21st century version of autocracy designed to reinforce absolute rule. To achieve this, autocrats would need to embrace economic reforms and social change, allowing them to efficiently deliver public goods and services. It was an approach that rejected the recognition of basic freedoms and political rights, but was eventually likely to produce a more open and inclusive political system that ensured a stake for all segments of society.

Concurrent 3	Strategic Update: South Asia
<b>Instigator</b>	<p><b>U Khin Maung Lynn</b>  Joint Secretary  Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies  Myanmar</p>
<b>Speakers</b>	<p><b>Dr Maria Sultan</b>  President and Chairperson  South Asian Strategic Stability Institute (SASSI) University  Pakistan</p> <p><b>Dr Dinusha Panditaratne</b>  Executive Director  Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute on International Relations and Strategic  Studies  Sri Lanka</p> <p><b>Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury</b>  Principal Research Fellow and Research Lead (Multilateral and International  Linkages)  Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS)  National University of Singapore (NUS)  Singapore</p> <p><b>Mr Dhruva Jaishankar</b>  Fellow  Foreign Policy Studies  Brookings India  India</p>

Dr Sultan underscored the game-changing significance of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to Pakistan, in particular via the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Ongoing investments and developments will see the country finally realise its strategic potential as a major connector for trade. Nevertheless, the relationship with India has not stabilised and could get worse if not checked.

While India’s economy is growing well, significant hurdles remain. In the words of Mr Jaishakar, “India is a 21st century country governed by a 19th century state”. Regionally, India will have to balance its domestic needs and capacity with its regional ambitions while paying more attention to various ongoing and nascent issues with its neighbours.

For Sri Lanka, Dr Panditaratne identified development and peace within the context of a post-war country as major concerns of policy makers in Colombo. The country is also trying to broaden its strategic and trade relationships so as not to become too dependent on China.

Dr Chowdhury focused on the various structural problems that have plagued various South Asian regional institutions and argued that it is high time for a leaders-led summit in the region for there to be any progress. Both Sri Lanka and Bangladesh reiterated their longstanding concern over the lack of significant and workable regional mechanisms for peace and security, which were largely influenced by the competition and dynamics between India and Pakistan.

Concurrent 4	Strategic Update: Central Asia
<b>Instigator</b>	<p><b>Mr Timofei Bordachev</b>  Programme Director  Valdai Discussion Club;  Director  Centre for Comprehensive European and International Studies  National Research University Higher School of Economics  Russia</p>
<b>Speakers</b>	<p><b>Dr Vladimir I Norov</b>  Director  Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies  Uzbekistan</p> <p><b>Dr Roy Anthony Rogers</b>  Head  Department of International and Strategic Studies  Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  University of Malaya  Malaysia</p> <p><b>Dr Meirat Omarov</b>  Head of Department  Foreign Policy and International Security  Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies  Kazakhstan</p>

Strategically positioned at the heart of the continent, the region of Central Asia is a melting pot of various civilisations (Turkish, Asian and Russian) that have traversed the area for trade and other purposes for centuries. The cultural elements absorbed from these civilisations have helped created a vibrant region which, despite its diversity, is united by some common characteristics. These include socio-cultural traits (of Islamic and Turkish influence), shared economic interests (as landlocked countries) and common security concerns (instability in West Asia and Afghanistan).

Although traditionally playing a peripheral role in international politics, Central Asia has recently garnered inflated interest from those outside the region. In this, the region's strategic position could be both a liability and opportunity. Not only could the impact of US-Russia tension spill into the region, Central Asia has also been pulled into China's scheme to revive the ancient Silk Road, labelled as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China is also interested in the stability of the region, as emanating threats, such as terrorism, extremism and separatism, could leak into China's Xinjiang province. Furthermore, the region's landlocked status means that the countries have to transport their oil produce through pipelines, a subject that is often politicised by external actors.

Regional architectures, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), are expected to remain relevant in the future. This is not only facilitated by the Central Asian countries' expanding economic interests, but also by the understanding to foster cooperation to mitigate security issues, such as terrorism and human trafficking.

<b>Plenary 2</b>	<b>America First, China Rising: A New Global Order?</b>
<b>Instigator</b>	<b>Dr Dino Patti Djalal</b> Founder Foreign Policy Community of Indonesia (FPCI) Indonesia
<b>Speakers</b>	<p><b>Dr Walter Lohman</b> Director Asian Studies Center Davis Institute for National Security and Foreign Policy The Heritage Foundation USA</p> <p><b>Professor Xiang Lanxin</b> Professor International History and Politics The Graduate Institute Geneva; Director Centre of One Belt and One Road Studies China National Institute for SCO International Exchange and Judicial Cooperation China</p> <p><b>Professor Ken Jimbo</b> Faculty of Policy Management Graduate School of Media and Governance Keio University Japan</p> <p><b>Mr Anton Tsetov</b> Senior Analyst Center for Strategic Research Russian International Affairs Council Russia</p>

The interaction, if not the rivalry, that concerns the United States and China, and their ever-changing dynamics, continues to perpetuate the notion that there is a geopolitical shift between the superpowers in the current global order. Professor Jimbo argued that the debate surrounding the global power transition had consistently revolved around the US-China compass, with the rise of China as the centrepiece in the shift in regional power distribution.

In contrast, Professor Xiang did not believe in the phenomenon of the rise of China, a widespread concept perpetuated by the West. History showed that there had always been a cultural difference between China and the West. The US-China relationship today is less about rivalry but more about the potential restoration of ties, especially under President Trump.

Dr Lohman followed the same sentiment. He contended that President Trump's administration had shown similar commitments to Obama's, including defense developments in the South China Sea and diplomacy vis-à-vis ASEAN centrality. Mr Tsvetov interestingly stated that the structure of the current global order would remain, with continuity as its foundation. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is an example whereby regional powers come together to work for the betterment of their countries.

<b>Plenary 3</b>	<b>Innovating ASEAN, Preserving Resilience</b>
<b>Instigator</b>	<b>Dr Pavida Pananond</b> Thammasat Business School Thammasat University Thailand
<b>Speakers</b>	<p><b>Ms Nur Sulyna Abdullah</b> Chief Officer Corporate Strategy Sector Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) Malaysia</p> <p><b>Ms Moe Thuzar</b> Lead Researcher (Socio-Cultural) ASEAN Studies Centre ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute Singapore</p> <p><b>Professor Dr Dewi Fortuna Anwar</b> Chairman Institute for Democracy and Human Rights The Habibie Center Indonesia</p>

According to Dr Pavida, the Asian financial crisis shaped ASEAN resilience through the rules and regulations placed for intra-regional trade. The borderless nature of the Internet had made competition in the age of digital economy dynamic. Coming from a telecommunication and multimedia regulatory authority's perspective, Ms Sulyna suggested that ASEAN required a cohesive cyber security framework to build on its innovation and resilience. Laws were also required to withstand the increasing numbers of cyber-attacks.

Ms Thuzar highlighted that by 2050, 60 percent of the ASEAN population would reside in urban areas. Considering the different levels of adaptability by ASEAN communities, innovative measures, such as the ASEAN Smart Cities Network introduced by Singapore, would help to create a sense of safety, resilience and protection. This would also facilitate the communities' response to new technologies and innovation.

Dr Dewi pointed out that all 10 ASEAN member states may have different priorities. However, regional resilience undoubtedly added to serve as national interests, provided that the people of ASEAN were at the core of the decision making process.

Questions were asked on education and the principle of non-interference. All three speakers agreed on the need for better and harmonised education to build ASEAN's resilience in the future. As for the principle of non-interference, while it has its disadvantages, it has also succeeded in ensuring peace and consistent cooperation among the member states in the region.

<b>Wednesday, 9 May 2018</b>	
<b>Concurrent 5</b>	<b>Technology and the Battlefield: The Evolving Nature of Warfare</b>
<b>Instigator</b>	<p><b>Professor Dr Nguyen Vu Tung</b>  President  Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam (DAV)  Vietnam</p>
<b>Speakers</b>	<p><b>Ms Elsa B Kania</b>  Adjunct Fellow  Technology and National Security Program  Center for a New American Security  USA</p> <p><b>Ms Margherita D’Ascanio</b>  Regional Legal Advisor  International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)  Malaysia</p> <p><b>Ms Zoe Stanley-Lockman</b>  Associate Research Fellow  Maritime Security Programme  Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS)  S Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)  Singapore</p>

This session examined how technology continues to shape the threat and use of force through the emergence of autonomous systems, artificial intelligence (AI) and cyberspace.

Ms Kania pointed out that engagement on AI can create the innovation culture on a global scale, but there are risks as such engagements can be exploited. She also highlighted that major powers recognise that AI will be critical to national power and competitiveness in the future.

Ms D’Ascanio highlighted that the evolving nature of warfare, such as of lethal autonomous weapons (LAWs) and cyber-attacks could have an impact on international law, particularly Laws of Armed Conflicts (LOAC).

According to Ms Stanley-Lockman, technology had the potential to transform warfare. Nonetheless, it is highly dependent on how technology is utilised by the military or militarised actors.

The Q&A session included questions on the legal aspects of human involvement in operative situations involving autonomous systems and the acceptable measures to keep technologies from malicious purposes.

<b>Concurrent 6</b>	<b>Future-Proofing Against Violent Extremism</b>
<b>Instigator</b>	<b>Mr Muhammad Sinatra</b> Analyst Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia
<b>Speakers</b>	<b>Dr Rommel Banlaoi</b> Chairman of the Board and Executive Director Philippines Institute for Peace, Violence and Terrorism Research The Philippines  <b>Ms Dwi Rubiyanti Khalifah</b> Director Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN) Indonesia  <b>Dr Eliane Ursula Etmüller</b> Postdoctoral Researcher Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies Germany

This session explored the discussion on war against violent extremism that has been plaguing the region and beyond especially after the emergence of Daesh in mid-2014. This new phase of extremism has brought in new narratives in terms of recruitment styles, gender participation and communication platforms utilised as propaganda dissemination machine.

Dr Rommel highlighted the Marawi siege event and the complexity of extremism in the Philippines, as other criminal elements – such as drug trafficking, arms trafficking, human smuggling and cybercrime – in the hostile areas have intermingled with the activity of radical groups to further complicate the efforts of bringing down extremism. Considering this, the Philippines is not just committed to countering extreme narratives, but also to reconstruction efforts.

Taking a different angle, Dr Etmüller presented on Europe’s experience in dealing with gender-extremism. Unlike in Southeast Asia, female participation in radical activities in Europe is not a new phenomenon. This participation does not only stay within the circle of mundane and supporting roles such as maintaining shelters, providing meals, exercising small-scale recruitments, or as bearer of future fighters; the radical female community in Europe has over the years expanded their involvement in activities, such as suicide bombing, taking up arms and disseminating extreme ideologies in various interactive platforms, such as blogs, magazines affiliated to terror groups, videos, as well as movies.

In Southeast Asia, the rising female participation and growing influential roles beyond recruitment and fund-raising roles have triggered anxiety. Ms Ruby underscored how gender construction in Southeast Asia had unfortunately assisted Daesh in the construction of their messages that target the female gender. She pointed out that traditional stigmatisations have often marginalised women. Daesh, through their current narratives, welcomes the marginalised women and encourage them to take part in their cause as part of self-redemption efforts and for the sense of belonging. Realising the importance of a whole-of-nation approach in addressing this issue, Indonesia has continuously invested in their gender-mainstreaming programmes, which not only focus on a single factor, but on various spectrums of root causes, such as women empowerment, poverty and domestic abuse.

<b>Plenary 4</b>	<b>The State of the Region: The Future of APEC and Regional Economic Partnership Arrangements</b>
<b>Instigator</b>	<b>Dato' Steven Wong</b> Deputy Chief Executive Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia
<b>Speakers</b>	<b>Mr Patrick Tay</b> Deals Partner Economics and Policy PricewaterhouseCoopers Malaysia  <b>Professor Natasha Hamilton-Hart</b> Department of Management and International Business; Director New Zealand Asia Institute University of Auckland New Zealand  <b>Dr Li Wei</b> Assistant Professor School of International Studies Renmin University China

New economic and political developments in the Asia Pacific threaten to cloud the prospect of deepening regional economic integration. Dato' Steven highlighted two competing building blocks of Asia-Pacific trade architecture, namely, rules-based order and super-bilateralism.

While the rules-based trading system is currently under threat, the speakers concurred that countries need to reach a consensus on trade and investment rule-making through democratic processes.

Mr Tay believed that the market will not function well without rules. Trade rules are not just a concept between two or three economic giants, but that of all countries involved.

Dr Li disagreed with the accusation that China did not adhere to international trade rules. He clarified that the Washington Consensus was not a one-size-fits-all solution and that China may adopt its own rules that suit its national interest.

Amidst rising protectionist sentiments, Professor Hamilton-Hart argued that the backlash against trade was wrongly directed. Many of the negative sentiments associated with trade have instead largely been due to technological change. She asserted that negotiating parties have to recognise that there are differences in the parties' demand from the trade agreement. She further emphasised the need for negotiating parties to agree which issues are domestic and which are international.

Regaining trust through delivering substantive policies is critical to stemming this phenomenon. The speakers agreed that this was a challenge given trends like the discrediting of experts, but also a necessary effort since it will impact both domestic and foreign policy.

## WELCOMING REMARKS

---

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

7 May 2018

ASEAN-ISIS Heads,

Distinguished guests and conference participants,

Ladies and gentlemen,

*Assalamualaikum Warahmatullah Wabarakatuh* and a very good afternoon.

1. Welcome to the 32nd Asia-Pacific Roundtable (APR). Welcome to beautiful Malaysia and to the ever vibrant city of Kuala Lumpur. To the loyal supporters of the APR, welcome back. You are here in very exciting and anxious times in the history of this country.
2. I wish to especially acknowledge the presence of Mr Khin Maung Lynn, Joint Secretary of the Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies. He would be delivering the opening remarks on behalf of Ambassador U Nyunt Maung Shein who is currently the Chairman of ASEAN-ISIS.
3. I have said this before, at the closing of the 30th APR two years ago: "Planning for a conference such as this is not a simple matter even if you have accumulated three decades of experience organising it".
4. When my colleagues and I set out to plan this APR, we started by trying to fix suitable dates. Next, we looked at possible themes. We finally settled for the theme, "Disruption: People, Technology, Power and Security". I will explain later as to why and how we came to that decision.
5. From there, we began to work out the sessions and the topics for different sessions. Later on, we started identifying the possible role players who would fit into the different sessions.
6. As to the dates, two factors were foremost on our mind – the month of Ramadan and the 14th general elections in Malaysia. We settled for early May since Ramadan is set to begin on 17 May. We try to skirt Ramadan so as to avoid the inconveniences associated with having a conference during the fasting month. We did the same thing last year.
7. It is not that people do not work during Ramadan in Malaysia. Life goes on as usual: no shorter working hours, no discernible decrease in everyday activity. Indeed, there would be more excitement; people would be busy shopping and preparing for Hari Raya or the Eid, the Ramadan bazaars would be bustling and Ramadan buffets would be found in nearly every hotel and many restaurants.
8. But there are certain constraints when organising a big conference, such as the APR, during the month of Ramadan. We certainly do not want to have awkward situations such as when, among others, a section of the participants could partake of refreshment and lunch, while another section would be fasting for the day.

9. As to the other factor concerning the dates, no matter how hard we tried, we could not accurately predict the date of the 14th general elections. Earlier we thought that elections would be over by mid-April. This was because when we extended the customary invitation to the Prime Minister to deliver the keynote address and officiate the opening of the 32nd APR, he accepted and he also chose to do it on the morning of 8th May.
10. Later when it appeared that elections would not be held in April, like many others, I confidently laid my bet on the 5th of May. I thought that would be a nice prelude to the APR, which would start just two days after elections. That bet was obviously a lousy one. Now, as we are all aware, elections would be held on 9th May, less than two days from now.
11. I mentioned earlier that disruption is the theme for this year's APR. Disruption can put you off-balance and if you do not adjust, adapt, innovate or change, you may not recover from the situation and could suffer serious consequences.
12. Disruption has definitely descended upon us in respect of this year's APR. Fortunately, it happened not in a way that we could not adjust or change.
13. It is very obvious to everyone by now that our initial plan and earlier programme has been disrupted. By an interesting twist of irony, it is connected to the title of our first plenary session: "Politics in Southeast Asia: Change or Status Quo?" And it is also about people and power, two of the components identified in our theme. About 60 hours from now, we would know whether the people of Malaysia have used their power to elect for change or status quo.
14. When the Malaysian Elections Commission (SPR) announced 9th May as the date for GE14, we at ISIS Malaysia had to think and act quickly. We immediately ruled out the Prime Minister's presence since he would be busy with the elections. For that matter, we had to rule out the presence of any Malaysian political figure at this time. We were also conscious of the fact that the Malaysian participants would need time to go out to vote. It is no surprise that some have chosen to skip the APR altogether, especially those who have to vote outside of Kuala Lumpur.
15. We had no choice but to adjust our plan and rearrange the programme. We conferred, made phone calls and sent out e-mails. We consulted our ASEAN-ISIS partners, the role players, the vendors and of course, the Hilton. Everyone understood the situation.
16. Let me at this juncture say thank you to everyone for your understanding and cooperation. Thank you to all participants. Thank you in particular to the role players, some of whom have had to rearrange their schedules and travel plans in order to fit with the new conference programme.
17. So, ladies and gentlemen, here we are. As it stands, we begin the 32nd Asia-Pacific Roundtable this afternoon and would end it with lunch on Wednesday, 9th May. That should give a few hours to those Malaysian participants and ISIS Malaysia staffs, who would be at the conference on Wednesday, to go to the polling stations before they close at 5.00pm.
18. The Prime Minister, the Hon Dato' Sri Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak, who was initially due to give the keynote address tomorrow morning, has informed us that regretfully he is unable to attend – but for reasons that I think we can all fully understand! We can rest assured that he has been a long-standing and strong supporter of the APR series and would continue to be in future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

19. Today we begin series 32 of the APR. The track record of the APR speaks for itself. It has successfully carved its own niche and reputation. We just have to continue to make it better as one of the world's most important Track Two conferences. This we try to achieve by assembling a formidable, high quality panel of speakers and discussants deliberating on the most pressing political, security, economic and other related issues that concern not only the region, but also the world at large. I think we have been able to do that again this year.
20. As with previous iterations of the APR, this year we look at the big picture and also zero in on the micro issues. This is what distinguishes the APR from other fora in the region that focus mainly on security and defence issues.
21. Our theme for the 32nd APR is "Disruption: People, Technology, Power and Security". This takes into account the global and regional political, security and economic landscape and environment. At the same time, we recognise the role of technology, in particular digital technology, in shaping our opinions and our lives as well as its disruptive effects in practically all spheres of human activity. We want to examine the impact, implications and ramifications, both positive and negative, of disruption and the digital age on politics, democracy, elections, governance, foreign policy, security, defence, connectivity, regional integration, trade and commerce, and many other facets of life, even on how war is conducted now and in the future.
22. The topics before us have been carefully chosen with the above objective in mind. The sessions are thus arranged and role players chosen to follow the same line of thinking. Except we had to rearrange the sequencing of the different sessions to fit with the new programme.
23. Disruption we have had as far as the organisation of this Roundtable is concerned. But disruption is not always negative. The disruption we experienced is positive in many ways. Those of you who have come from abroad would not have had the chance to witness, first hand, democracy in action in Malaysia, if not for this interesting coincidence of timing between the 32nd APR and Malaysia's GE14.
24. Therefore, with GE14 as the backdrop, it seems most appropriate that we begin our Roundtable with the session on politics in Southeast Asia. Besides Malaysia, other countries will also be conducting elections this year and in 2019 – Cambodia, Thailand and Indonesia. That explains our interest in seeing whether there will be change or status quo and what would the impact be on ASEAN and the wider region.
25. In this regard, I would like to point us to a report entitled *Democracy in Southeast Asia: Achievements, Challenges and Prospects*, which has been recently released by the Kofi Annan Foundation based in Geneva. This is a report of a conference held in Kuala Lumpur last September, organised jointly by the Foundation and SUHAKAM (Malaysian Human Rights Commission).
26. The report begins with a moving tribute to the late Tan Sri Dr Surin Pitsuwan, written by Kofi Annan himself. We all know Surin; scholar, professor, orator, Foreign Minister of Thailand and Secretary General of ASEAN, who passed away so suddenly in November 2017. In Annan's words, Surin was also a "skillful bridge-builder". He was a true Southeast Asian champion of democracy. His words in the foreword of the report duly attest to his belief that democracy is crucial in ASEAN. To him, democracy is an integral part of development and ASEAN's success in developing further would rest on the participation of the people through greater democratisation.

27. Let me also say that Surin was a friend to many of us and also a strong supporter of the APR and other ASEAN-ISIS activities. We miss this great son of Southeast Asia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

28. We have seen plenty of disruption in the last one year; not just in technology, but also in diplomacy, statecraft and leadership. Twenty years ago, President Habibie of Indonesia, being a scientist, stood out as an innovator when he communicated directly with other leaders by e-mail, bypassing the Foreign Ministry. Now we see the advent of a new era of leadership with President Trump utilising digital technology by simply tweeting his views and policy preferences. That has had some great impact leading to ground-breaking developments.

29. Who would have thought a year ago that the salvos of ballistic missile launches and nuclear tests by North Korea would give way in such a short span to a flurry of diplomatic activities that has produced a landmark summit between President Moon Jae-in and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un? The developments in the Korean Peninsula have been quite dizzying to say the least.

30. We now look forward to the much anticipated historic and ground-breaking summit between the President of the United States and the leader of the DPRK. The prospect of the ultimate end to the Korean War seems bright. Eventual denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula and a new era of peace and reconciliation in Northeast Asia should excite us all.

31. Pessimists among us would probably think in despair that chaos would descend upon the international order owing to heightened competition among the superpowers. The optimists would still see rays of hope for some order and stability to prevail especially in respect of the relations between the United States and China. I hope, at this APR, we can discuss and find answers to the complex situation brought about by an “America First” rhetoric and policy clashing against a rising and more assertive China.

32. We will also be discussing the shifts in political and economic power and the evolving dynamics of major power relations in the Asia Pacific. We will discuss the future of regional integration, including the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and other regional economic partnership agreements. We will study the new initiative to promote resilience and innovation in ASEAN and we will also look at the strategic and political situations in various sub-regions of Asia. For the first time, we have invited friends from Central Asia to discuss the dynamics in that region including the Greater Eurasia and the Belt and Road initiatives.

33. There is a famous quote from a celebrated novel called *The Leopard*, by Giuseppe di Lampedusa: “Everything must change so that everything can stay the same.”

34. But we know, however, that when change comes, not everything will stay the same. That is the nature of a world that witnesses constant advances in technology growing faster than ever. So has the technology that relates to warfare. We would be interested in that as well as the impact of autonomous technology on the battlefield. We hope to discuss those at this APR so as to understand the questions and possibly offer some useful policy recommendations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

35. This evening we would go in to a special panel discussion focusing on foreign policy in the digital age. It will be interesting to hear the views of the speakers on this. For instance, how

do governments and foreign ministries deal with social media and fake news? That session will no doubt provide fascinating insights on the conduct and management of foreign policy in the digital age and their implications on regional and international security.

36. In attempting to keep the APR fresh, current and exciting, this year we have assigned “instigators” instead of the more traditional “moderators” to take charge of the various sessions. Instigators are expected to not only provoke views and discussion among the panellists, but also contribute their own insights while managing the time and the panel and the interaction between panel and participants. I urge the instigators to be really provocative. Imagine yourselves as the host of BBC Hardtalk.
37. We hope that this new format would lead to an even more dynamic exchange of thoughts, not just amongst the panel, but with the participants. In the near future, there could be other innovations or changes. The APR itself could, for instance, be organised at a venue outside of Kuala Lumpur, perhaps even in Sabah or Sarawak. We are open to suggestions.
38. Let me now take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks and gratitude to the distinguished instigators and speakers for their readiness to share with us their time, knowledge and expertise in various ways, and for their tremendous contribution towards enhancing the richness of the discussions during this Roundtable.
39. I also extend heartfelt thanks and appreciation to our sponsors and supporters: The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Malaysia, UEM Group, Australian Government, the Embassy of Japan in Malaysia, the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Asia Center – Japan Foundation, Bank Muamalat Malaysia, PricewaterhouseCoopers Malaysia, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau. Their generous contributions and assistance have once again made it possible for us to successfully convene this 32nd Asia-Pacific Roundtable.
40. I also thank our colleagues in ASEAN-ISIS for their unwavering support for the APR process.
41. Last but not least, I wish to convey my sincere appreciation to all participants for their continued support and active participation. I wish to also thank, in particular, the long-time supporters of the APR who have travelled from far away to be at this Roundtable.
42. In any conference, the discussions are as equally important as the formal presentations. Probing, thoughtful questions and insightful interventions from the floor are important components of a conference and it is such inputs that form the distinctive hallmark of the Asia-Pacific Roundtable. I am confident that the discussions will be as lively and engaging as in the past.
43. Let us all have a fruitful and enjoyable 32nd Asia-Pacific Roundtable.

Thank you.

INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (ISIS) MALAYSIA

No. 1, Persiaran Sultan Salahuddin,

P.O. Box 12424, 50778 Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA

Tel : +603 2693 2060  
+603 2693 9366

Fax : +603 2691 3210

Email : [info@isis.org.my](mailto:info@isis.org.my)

Web : [isis.org.my](http://isis.org.my)



Institute of Strategic and  
International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia



ISIS\_MY