

Book Launch and Seminar on  
“New Southern Policy and ASEAN-ROK Relations:  
Enhancing Connectivity, Building Resilience”

Tuesday, 29 September 2020  
Kuala Lumpur

**Opening Remarks**

by

HE Lee Chi Beom,  
Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Malaysia

General Tan Sri Mohamad Hashim,  
Tan Sri Dr. Sulaiman Mahbob,  
Director Bae Sung-Won,

Distinguished participants and guests,

I would like to first express my sincere gratitude to Chairman, General Tan Sri Mohamad Hashim, Tan Sri Dr Sulaiman Mahbob and Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia for organizing today’s event. I would like to also thank all of you who are here for your participation today.

My special thanks goes to ISIS for following up on the forum held in November last year by publishing a book, and also providing an opportunity to further discuss ways to strengthen cooperation and deepen the relations between ASEAN and the ROK.

Last year marked the 30th Anniversary of the establishment of Dialogue Relations between ASEAN and the ROK. And this year marks the 60th Anniversary of the official diplomatic relations between Malaysia and the ROK. The two countries proclaimed 2020 as the “Year of Common Vision” with the catch-phrase of “Meet, Exchange and Share.”

It is very unfortunate that the COVID-19 pandemic swept the world since early this year and many events to commemorate the 60th Anniversary between our two countries could not take place as planned.

If it was not for the COVID-19, we would have had much bigger crowd here today, but I am still very thankful that we could at least have some participants joining us in the online video conference format. I would like to also thank the Korea Foundation (KF) for supporting this valuable opportunity for us to “Meet, Exchange and Share.”

Distinguished participants,

As we all know, ASEAN plays a key role in international politics and economy and is extremely important for the ROK. Last year, more than ten million Koreans visited ASEAN Member States, making the region the number one overseas travel destination for Koreans. ASEAN is also the second-largest trading partner and the largest contractor for Korean construction companies.

The ROK President Moon Jae-in introduced the New Southern Policy in 2017 and has been making efforts to enhance cooperation with ASEAN by promoting a People-centered Community of Peace and Prosperity built upon the Three Pillars (3Ps) of People, Prosperity, and Peace.

He is the first Korean president to visit all ten ASEAN Member States during his term in office. President Moon has also successfully hosted the ASEAN-ROK Commemorative Summit in November 2019 and elevated partnership between ASEAN and the ROK to a higher level.

The ROK government also seeks to substantially upgrade the New Southern Policy. For instance, as Minister Kang Kyung-wha mentioned at the ASEAN-ROK Foreign Ministers' Meeting earlier this month, the ROK government is seeking new ways to further broaden the scope of cooperation with ASEAN, including the launch of a cooperation initiative between the ROK and maritime Southeast Asia in addition to the existing one between the ROK and Mekong.

With the emergence of non-traditional security issues, such as climate change and environment, our government aims to develop ASEAN-ROK relations centered around 'human security and development.' Such aim has become even more timely and appropriate during the pandemic. In fact, supporting capacity building for 'better resilience to regional contingencies' is already included as one of the policy objectives of the New Southern Policy.

Distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

Malaysia is the founding member of ASEAN and a key player in the region. Traditionally, the bilateral relationship between Malaysia and the ROK has also been one of the most important in the region. Since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1960, our two countries have enjoyed an ever-growing long friendship.

During the 60 years, the volume of our bilateral trade multiplied by six thousand(6,000), from less than 3 million US dollars in 1965 to over 18 billion US dollars in 2019, making Malaysia by itself the tenth largest trading partner for Korea. The number of visitors between the two countries have exceeded one million for the first time in 2019. Even more visits and high-level exchanges had been planned and expected for this year, but to much regret the unforeseen COVID-19 situation has made those difficult.

The path back to the normal life may still be far ahead of us. However, I want to point out that now may be the time to really take advantage of our mature bilateral relations and seek cooperation between our two countries, Malaysia and Korea, by overcoming the COVID-19 together and showing our resilience to the world.

The COVID-19 situation has revealed many areas for potential cooperation, not only in healthcare and medicine, but also in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technology-based partnerships and smart city, among others.

The book to be launched by ISIS today lists three guiding principles to implement the New Southern Policy : institutionalization of cooperation; cultivation of networks; and consolidation of nexuses. The book also argues that new areas of cooperation needs to be explored. I fully agree with the book's analysis and recommendations.

I would like to point out that many of the suggested new areas of cooperation between ASEAN and the ROK, such as middle-power diplomacy, digital economy, e-government, physical and soft infrastructure capabilities and connectivity are areas where the ROK is already making progress with some ASEAN Member States, including Malaysia.

Therefore, I think it may be useful to first make headways and achieve success in bilateral cooperation between Malaysia and Korea, for example, and then expand it to other ASEAN Member States or ASEAN as a whole.

The existing great power rivalry seems to be further intensified by the COVID-19 situation. Limitations in movement across the borders or recent trends of trade protectionism and nationalism might not be just temporary setbacks caused by the pandemic. This could be the beginning of a more fundamental changes.

Against this background, I believe that the ROK has many potential areas of cooperation with ASEAN, and with Malaysia in particular, to survive and overcome such strategic uncertainties as our two sides have shared interests and many things in common.

I hope the panel discussions to be followed today will include active exchanges of ideas and discuss resilience in the context of what great changes and challenges we are facing during this era of the COVID-19 pandemic and what needs to be done to cope with them.

Distinguished participants,

The ROK's New Southern Policy is not a one-sided doctrine or principle, but an evolving process that needs to be updated and upgraded together with ASEAN and the Member States.

ASEAN and the ROK have overcome many crises together through cooperation. We will do the same with the COVID-19 and looming economic difficulties, and I count on Malaysia to be the closest ally.

In the late 90s, it was the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997-98 that sounded the alarm for the urgent need to strengthen cooperation among the countries in the region, which eventually led to the ASEAN+3 (APT) and then the East Asia Summit (EAS). A decade later, the first ASEAN-ROK Commemorative Summit celebrating the 20 years of Dialogue Relations was held in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis.

We may be undergoing a crisis at this very moment too that is equal or even greater than one or two decades ago. I sincerely hope that today's discussions will present to us the wisdom for the next decade or more.

Lastly, our Embassy have been coordinating with ISIS in organizing a network of Malaysia Scholars on Korea, or MASK. I appreciate the role of ISIS in this regard, and would like to ask everyone here today for your support and participation in the MASK event being planned for later this year.

Thank you, and **“Let's Stay Strong, Malaysia and Korea!”**

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