

60 years and Beyond: Preparing Malaysia-South Korea relations for a New Era  
4th Malaysia Scholars on Korea (MASK) Annual Event

Thursday, 10 December 2020

Kuala Lumpur

**Opening Remarks**

by

**HE Lee Chi Beom,**

Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Malaysia

Yang Berbahagia Mr. Herizal Hazri,

Dear MASK Network members,

Distinguished participants,

Good morning, *Selamat pagi dan selamat datang!*

I would like to first express my sincere gratitude to Chief Executive Yang Berbahagia Mr. Herizal Hazri and Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia for organizing today's event. I would like to also thank and extend warm welcome to the members of the MASK Network and all of you joining us online, including the speakers from Malaysia and Korea.

Please allow me to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to ISIS for the launching of the book on our government's New Southern Policy in September this year, and also for publishing a special edition of ISIS Focus on the way forward for the New Southern Policy in November.

Although we are already in December, as you all know this year marks the 60th Anniversary of the official diplomatic relations between Malaysia and the Republic of Korea. It is deeply regrettable that many events to commemorate the anniversary could not be held as planned due to the COVID-19. In the midst of this on-going situation, I am very pleased to hold today's MASK Network event with so many participants albeit in online webinar format.

Distinguished participants,

MASK, or Malaysia Scholars on Korea Network, was first launched in December three years ago right after President Moon Jae-in proclaimed the New Southern Policy (NSP) in November 2017. Since the launch, MASK Network events were held every year, which makes this the fourth such event. The launch of the MASK Network was perfectly timed, especially in view of the developments in ASEAN-ROK and Korea-Malaysia bilateral relations in the last three years since the implementation of the New Southern Policy.

ASEAN has become the number one overseas travel destination for Koreans with more than ten million visiting the region in 2019. ASEAN is also ROK's second-largest trading partner, next only to China, and the largest contractor for Korean construction companies overseas.

Likewise, people-to-people exchanges between Korea and Malaysia have grown to over one million visitors in 2019. Malaysia is now one of the most popular tourist destination for Koreans travelling overseas. Bilateral trade between our two countries have also increased close to twenty(20) billion US dollars in 2019, placing Malaysia as the tenth largest trading partner for Korea. When compared to the figure in 1965, our bilateral trade volume has multiplied more than six thousand times.

During the same period, Korea-Malaysia bilateral relationship has continued to deepen through high-level visits and summit meetings. President Moon paid a state visit to Malaysia and hosted the ASEAN-ROK Commemorative Summit in 2019. President Moon and Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin attended the ASEAN Plus Three Special Summit earlier this year in April.

At the same time, efforts were made to enhance and upgrade the New Southern Policy, which culminated in the President Moon Jae-in's unveiling of the 'New Southern Policy Plus (NSP+)' strategy at the ASEAN-ROK Summit in November this year. The NSP+ strengthens and expands the existing policy while taking into account the changes and new challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

ASEAN Leaders all welcomed and expressed support for the NSP+ strategy. In particular, Prime Minister Muhyiddin expressed his hopes that the mutually beneficial cooperation will further expand through the NSP+.

Dear MASK Members and Distinguished Participants,

Even when faced with unprecedented challenges posed by the spread of COVID-19 this year, ASEAN-ROK partnership has become rather strengthened. Indeed, our joint efforts to overcome the pandemic deserves special attention. Korea is the first ASEAN dialogue partner to make a substantial contribution to the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund.

Furthermore, Korea launched various cooperation projects amounting to a total of 34 million US dollars in this year alone. They include projects in areas such as human capital development and disaster management.

Earlier this year in April, at the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) Special Summit on COVID-19, President Moon Jae-in pledged to provide medical assistance to the ASEAN countries. To implement the pledge, the Korean government has launched a project titled "Enhancing the Detection Capacity for COVID-19 in ASEAN Countries." The project provides each of the ten ASEAN countries with medical supplies and equipments worth a total of half a million (500,000) US dollars from the ASEAN-ROK Cooperation Fund (AKCF).

First among the ASEAN countries, we delivered twenty-three thousand COVID-19 test and swab kits each to Malaysia's Ministry of Health last month. More deliveries of PCR and Personal Protective Equipments (PPE) will soon be on their way.

Prime Minister Muhyiddin pointed out at the ASEAN-ROK Summit that "Malaysia itself has benefitted from Korea's assistance in increasing its COVID-19 testing capacity." As such, Malaysia and Korea are working together even in coping with COVID-19 and expanding the horizon of cooperation in new areas.

Against this background, the 'New Southern Policy Plus' strategy highlights the renewed promise and commitment by Korea to continue and further develop the cooperation with the ASEAN region. The strategy incorporates the changed environment and new demands both at home and abroad. Most notable are the trade conflict between major countries and increased importance of health and medical cooperation due to COVID-19 pandemic.

The NSP+ maintains the vision of ‘A People-centered Community of Peace and Prosperity.’ The strategy is anchored in four principles, which are: people-centered, inclusive and shared growth, connectivity, and trust building.

The NSP+ lays out fresh, feasible initiatives centered on the seven key areas of cooperation, or initiatives, that will embody detailed and specific plans for actual implementation.

First and foremost, the NSP+ puts forward ‘Comprehensive Public Health Cooperation’ as the top priority in the post-COVID-19 era. It also plans to provide various programmes to support ‘Education and Human Resources Development.’ It thereby aims to assist the countries in the region in building the foundations for national development in the long-term. The initiative for ‘Boosting Two-Way Cultural Exchanges to Enhance Mutual Understanding’ will promote people-to-people exchanges.

The NSP+ ultimately aims to nurture comprehensive shared growth with countries in the region by establishing ‘Reciprocal and Sustainable Basis for Trade and Investment.’ In addition, the strategy seeks to promote ‘Mutually Beneficial Infrastructure Assistance in Agricultural and Urban Development’ based on Korea’s own experience. This initiative is aimed at achieving higher standard of living, reducing regional inequality and strengthening infrastructure in rural and urban areas.

Looking further into the future, the NSP+ also includes ‘Cooperation for Co-Prosperity in Future Industries’ such as information and communications technology (ICT) and digital economy.

Lastly, but surely not the least, ‘Cooperation in Non-Traditional Security Issues’ will save people’s lives and foster safer and peaceful Asian community. The initiative will target common threats, such as climate change, natural disasters, terrorist attacks and damages to the environment.

President Moon Jae-in also expressed support for the ‘ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF).’ He hoped that the framework and the NSP+ together could pave the way for both ASEAN and Korea to enjoy a great prosperity.

Distinguished Participants,

I sincerely hope that everyone joining us here today would continue to show great interest and support for further strengthening the solidarity and cooperation between ASEAN and Korea. Through the New Southern Policy Plus, we can realize the vision of 'A People-centered Community of Peace and Prosperity.'

As the Korean ambassador to Malaysia, I will do my best to enhance cooperation between our two countries. I believe that the NSP+ strategy can also be pursued in harmony with Malaysia's 'Look East Policy 2.0.' Our cooperation can further expand not only in promoting trade and investment, but also through mutually beneficial exchanges in other areas including education, culture, and high technology innovation.

Dear MASK Members and Participants,

I am confident that today's event will provide a very timely and meaningful opportunity to review the past and present bilateral relations between Korea and Malaysia. I look forward to many recommendations to make it even better.

I also believe that it will be a valuable opportunity to consider ways to best implement the NSP+ strategy by finding the nexus with the Korea-Malaysia bilateral relations.

This afternoon's Session Two will discuss future-oriented cooperation and explore new areas of cooperation. I very much look forward to new areas and untried ideas that will add depth and expand the scope of our bilateral cooperation.

Next in today's programme is appointment and introduction of New MASK Members. I would like to extend my warm welcome and sincere congratulations to the six new members. I regret that the certificates cannot be handed out in person as this event is held online only, but I promise to meet you all soon when the conditions improve.

Until then, **"Let's Stay Strong, Malaysia and Korea!"**

*Terima kasih!*

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