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**34th ASIA-PACIFIC ROUNDTABLE  
“Disruption Redux”**

**Welcoming Remarks by Mr Herizal Hazri,  
Chief Executive  
Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia**

**17 August 2021, 9.40am (UTC+8)**

Dr Thitinan Pongsudhirak, Director of the Institute of Security and International Studies and  
Chair of the ASEAN-ISIS Network,

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organisation,

ASEAN-ISIS Heads and Members,

Excellencies

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you once again, to the Asia-Pacific Roundtable (APR). As many of you are aware, this roundtable is organised by ISIS Malaysia in cooperation with the Asean-ISIS Network – a network made up of Southeast Asia’s leading think-tanks.

In its nearly 3½ decades, the APR has grown significantly in scope, depth and size. It has gradually developed its own niche and reputation and is recognised worldwide as one of the most important annual Track-Two conferences in this region. This roundtable now regularly attracts policymakers, officials, policy practitioners, scholars, journalists, thought leaders, intellectuals, and interested individuals to engage in robust and constructive discussions on strategic issues concerning our region.

Initially, the APR was focussed on strategic security and diplomacy issues that affected the stability of the Asia-Pacific region, and Southeast Asia in particular. Over the years, we have sought to widen these topics to reflect the evolving issues that have and continue to impact the



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national and international construct of our region. These include the increasing and undeniable enmeshment and overlap between security and diplomacy with sustainability and prosperity.

This roundtable had modest but earnest beginnings when it was first convened in 1987. Then, it was held at the conference room of ISIS Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur. The tables that hosted those conversations are still there today, and still play host to frank and intellectual exchange of thoughts and ideas – at least till March last year when along with much of the world, ISIS Malaysia had to suspend in-person meetings and make the switch to virtual meetings and conferences. And here we are today, the first (and hopefully the last) fully virtual APR.

While the way we conduct the roundtable has changed, the aim – then and now – remains consistent. The APR seeks to serve as a platform for frank and policy-relevant discussions on the major strategic issues affecting the Asia-Pacific region at the Track-2 level. The APR, therefore, occupies a very specific space in the world of conferences. It is not an academic conference, even though many of our speakers and participants come from the academic world. The sessions and speakers are specifically chosen for their ability to speak and address the concerns of the policy world. But nor is the APR a conference dominated by officials. We are not primarily here to listen the policy pronouncements of senior officials. Rather, our key aim is to go deep to investigate and inform – in a way of creating traction for the making of effective policies that matters the countries throughout the region.

So that's what the APR is about: it is not Track 1.5 but decidedly Track 2 in its orientation. And that is how we intend to position the APR well into the future.

Excellencies, ladies and gentleman,

One of the challenges in developing a theme for a conference like the APR is to get the balance right between the realities of the day and the challenges of the future. For the 34th APR, we had to take into account another aspect – the past.

The theme of this year's conference is "Disruption Redux". In the preceding decade, as the lull of the post-Cold War euphoria wore off, the focus of APRs revolved around a plethora of disruptive issues and trends that were slowly but surely impacting the stability of strategic architectures which governed Southeast Asia and the wider Asia-Pacific.

Some of these disruptions were then-new issues, which are now major fixtures for many policymakers and practitioners, such as the ripple effects of the ongoing technology and cyber revolution, challenges to the resource-energy nexus and the impact of climate change to "traditional" security challenges. Others were older issues, those we thought were put to bed but are now back with a vengeance such as major power rivalry, terrorism, public health and the ever-troubling issues of refugees.



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Many aren't unfamiliar to us. Yet our response has indicated anything but. Almost 1½ years into the Covid-19 pandemic, national and regional architectures and the norms that shape policymaking are in the midst of their greatest disruptive phase since the Second World War.

Among the issues that the APR will cover this year include an examination on the impact of this pandemic on the global realignment of multilateral institutions, mechanism, norms, power and influence in the Asia-Pacific. Closer to home in Southeast Asia, we examine the social and political costs of the pandemic in Southeast Asia, and Asean's response to the issues.

We will also convene a session on the challenge of vaccine diplomacy and its impact on regional strategic calculations. More importantly is the vaccines actual distribution, especially at a time when Southeast Asia, which is home and the subject of attention of most of our participants, is facing a deadly spike in infections of the Delta variant.

Still on the topic of disruption, the 34th APR will also explore the question of digital sovereignty in Southeast Asia, particularly an environment where the data economy and innovation are dependent on public policies and private sector progress, which isn't always reflected.

Also making a comeback to the APR, is a session on the developments in the South China Sea. We are experiencing rising tensions from territorial disputes, and the seeming subsuming of the dispute in major power rivalry that are further compounded by a lack of meaningful progress on the Code of Conduct negotiations.

Lastly, this APR will conclude with a session dedicated to the internal and external repercussions of the 1 February coup in Myanmar – which whether we like it or not, will colour external perceptions on not just the country, but Asean and its member states as a whole.

Excellencies, ladies and gentleman,

I wish to express 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 conference.

I would also like to express our heartfelt gratitude to our partners, who have been with us through thick and thin – the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, the Embassy of the People's Republic of China, Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Google and the Embassy of Japan in Malaysia. Their support for the APR process have once again made it possible for us to reconvene, albeit virtually, for the 34th APR.



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Thank you also to colleagues in Asean-ISIS for your unwavering support and confidence in the APR process.

Last but not least, I wish to convey my sincere appreciation to all my hardworking colleagues at ISIS Malaysia for without their dedication, this event could not have taken place. To the participants, I am humbled by your continuous support and active participation. Probing, thoughtful questions and insightful interventions from the floor are important components of a conference. It is such important inputs that form the distinctive hallmark of the Asia-Pacific Roundtable.

And while these exchanges will be taking place virtually, I am confident that the discussions will be as lively and engaging as in the past. I wish everyone a fruitful and enjoyable 34th Asia-Pacific Roundtable.

Finally, to all my family and friends in Indonesia and abroad, *Selamat Hari Kemerdekaan yang ke 76. Semoga Allah senantiasa merahmati Republik Indonesia.* Happy Independence Day, Indonesia!

Thank you.



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**About ISIS Malaysia**

The Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia was established on 8 April 1983 as an autonomous national think-tank. ISIS Malaysia's establishment was inspired by the idea that both the country and government could benefit from the contributions of policy-relevant work undertaken by a body outside the government on issues of national interests.

ISIS Malaysia engages actively in Track Two diplomacy and is a key founding member of several regional networks which promote the exchange of views and collaboration that feed into policymaking.