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MEDIA STATEMENT

ISIS Malaysia wraps up first day of the 35th Asia-Pacific Roundtable

Kuala Lumpur, 5 July 2022: Today, some of the leading minds in the region and around the world converged virtually to discuss pressing issues in the wake of the pandemic at the 35th Asia-Pacific Roundtable (APR), the region's premier Track Two strategic conference.

This year's **fully virtual 35th APR** was officially convened by **Prime Minister Dato' Sri Ismail Sabri Yaakob**. In his keynote address, the prime minister calls for all members of the international community to redouble their efforts in the face of uncertainties and zero-sum competition to work towards a peaceful, progressive, inclusive, and prosperous future.

He also cautions the region against succumbing to major power competition, as it can undermine global norms of peaceful negotiation to settle disputes and respect for national sovereignty.

ISIS Malaysia chief executive Herizal Hazri, in his opening remarks, provided an overview of the Roundtable, and reminded delegates that probing, thoughtful questions and insightful interventions from the floor were important components of the Asia-Pacific Roundtable.

"We do not merely laud successes or broach failures. Our key aim is to analyse critical issues, to create a launchpad for the making of effective policies that matter for the countries in our region," says Herizal.

Asean-ISIS Network Chair and Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam vice-president Assoc **Prof Dr Hoang Anh Tuan**, in his opening remarks, reminded participants of the importance of cross-border dialogue, as a way to promote frank, robust and constructive discussion on the key strategic issues that face our region, especially as our nations progress towards the new normal.

The first session of the 35th APR, titled "China's Dual-Circulation Strategy – A regional gamechanger", featured remarks by China's Ambassador to Malaysia **H.E. Ambassador Ouyang Yujing**. The ambassador lamented the rise of protectionism, especially in a post-pandemic world, where global coordination and cooperation was more important than ever.

"China is committed to sharing our prosperity with other countries, and is fully committed to opening up and will open even wider to the world."

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This was followed by a spirited discussion by panellists Singapore Institute of International Affairs Chairman **Assoc Prof Simon Tay**, Peking University's **Prof Justin Yifu Lin**, University of Tokyo's **Assoc Prof Asei Ito** and Australian National University's **Prof Jane Golley**.

Tay worries that China's Dual-Circulation Strategy, which emphasises domestic demand, will exacerbate tensions in the region and create a 'two-world system' in which you are either in China's system, or in the United States' system. "Is the strategy a Plan B to globalisation?"

He reminds countries in the region to be aware and attentive to this. "We need to stand for inclusion. It should be our (Asean's) effort to include not just China, but all major partners. We are trying to cultivate inter-dependency, rather than pre-dominance by any single partner."

Lin, Ito and Golley say the strategy is not new. "China's ambition (in adopting the Dual-Circulation Strategy) is to reduce its reliance on technology and boost self-reliance," says Golley. What is more concerning to her is the increasing geopolitical and strategic rivalry between the superpowers in the region.

"The language is growing increasingly combative," she says, adding that the path towards centrality was narrowing dramatically, specifically mentioning the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a strategic security dialogue between Australia, India, Japan, and the United States.

The first day ended with an ambassadorial session featuring Australian High Commissioner to Malaysia **H.E. Dr Justin Lee**.

Dr Lee states that Australia's future is tied to the region, and it is committed to Asean's centrality. "We have been long-standing, close and reliable partners, and we can look forward to more dynamic growth in our partnership, in order to continue our collective responsibility of creating a region that is prosperous and underpinned by rules and norms."

"We support the right of all Asean countries to shape their own destinies and make their own choices about what is best for their nations, rather than have that choice be made for them," he adds.

The 35th Asia-Pacific Roundtable reconvenes tomorrow, and will feature a session on the impact of climate change and COP26 in Asia-Pacific, and the prospect that a more proactive European Union on the region's dynamics.

Tomorrow will also feature an ambassadorial session by New Zealand Ambassador to Asean **H.E. Stuart Calman** and a special address by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung chairman **Prof Dr Norbert Lammert**.

For more information on the event, and full bios of our speakers and instigators, visit <https://www.isis.org.my/apr35/>

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About ISIS Malaysia

The Institute of Strategic & 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.

About the Asia-Pacific Roundtable

The Asia-Pacific Roundtable (APR) is the signature international conference of the Institute of Strategic & International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia and is one of the region's key Track Two strategic conferences.

Hosted on behalf of the Asean-ISIS Network, a network of leading Southeast Asian policy institutes and think-tanks, it regularly attracts more than 300 thinkers of various backgrounds who engage in lively, frank and constructive conversations on issues impacting the security, stability, sustainability and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region.

Held annually since 1986, the APR was postponed for the first time in 2020 because of Covid-19. Over the past 33 years, the APR has cemented its position as a premier convention for policymakers, scholars, journalists and opinion leaders to ponder, reflect and debate on strategic issues and challenges relevant to Asia-Pacific.

The 35th APR is themed **sustaining cooperation amid competition**, and reflects the condition of the region that remains in the throes of strategic and major power competition and the importance of stakeholders to continue to find ways of cooperation, to mitigate the damaging aspects of competition.

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