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MEDIA STATEMENT

Strategic issues, major power rivalries dominate second day of 35th APR

Kuala Lumpur, 6 July 2022: The second day of the 35th Asia-Pacific Roundtable (APR) was dominated by strategic issues affecting the region.

The second session of the 35th APR, titled "Impact of climate change and COP26 in Asia-Pacific", featured a spirited discussion by panellists United Nations ESCAP Thailand's **Sangmin Nam**, Royal University of Phnom Penh's **Dr Chhinh Nyda**, Australia Institute's **Polly Hemming** and British High Commission Singapore's **Tom Moody**.

Sangmin, who provided a thorough overview of the topic, warned that the Asia-Pacific region was extremely vulnerable to the effects of climate change. This was further expounded by Dr Nyda, who broke down the climate hazards faced by Asean member states, specifically mentioning Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam as countries most at risk.

Hemming, speaking from Canberra, said Australia needed to work in good faith with its regional partners, and this includes China, to bring down emissions, but worried that Australia could slide back into protectionism and block emissions-reducing initiatives in the Asia-Pacific.

Moody was more positive. "The paradigm shift has already been achieved. The challenges are immense, but the economics of carbon-cutting measures, or even going net-zero emissions, are growing ever more compelling. As we keep bringing down the cost of alternative energy sources, we can decouple gross domestic product growth from emissions growth," he says, but warns that energy security will always be cause of concern when countries weigh the cost of carbon-cutting measures.

The session was followed by a special session by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung chairman **Prof Dr Norbert Lammert**. Speaking from Germany, Dr Lammert brought a sobering reminder of the ripple effects caused by a war two continents away, and how it can have staggering effects on the region.

"If we tolerate the use of force to change the status quo, the question is not whether it will have an impact (on Asia), but to what extent," he says, and calls for the Asia-Pacific, with its growing economic clout, to partner with Europe to champion a rules-based international order. "We must do this jointly, or not at all. For each of us cannot do this alone."

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His session was followed by the third session of the day. Titled "A resurgent Europe in Asia- / Indo-Pacific", it featured very prominent voices. Head of the European Union Delegation to Malaysia **H.E. Ambassador Michalis Rokas** was joined by University of The Philippines Diliman's **Dr Maria Thaemar C. Tana**, Centre for Asean Regionalism Universiti Malaya (CARUM) Malaysia Director **Dr Rahul Mishra** and Nanyang Technological University, Singapore's **Dr Frederick Kliem**.

Rokas also mentioned the European Union's commitment to a rules-based international order, adding that the region was of great strategic importance to the European Union, both in economic and geopolitical terms.

"In line with the region's strategic importance, the EU will continue, together with Asean member states, to explore options for enhanced naval deployments to contribute to the protection of sea lanes and promote freedom of navigation. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea lies at the heart of our engagements in the region."

Dr Tana cautioned that the EU's renewed interest in the region was causing tensions in the region to rise. While not denying that its Asia-Pacific pivot would bring benefits, not least of which was its commitment to promoting rules-based international order, she asserted that some Asean member states viewed the EU as a "complication in an already complicated space."

Dr Rahul, however, framed the EU's regional engagement strategy as one that was unique to the region – not a China-containment strategy. "The strategy does not view China as a strategic rival, nor as a partner. It does not view China in such binary terms." What the EU does lack, said Dr Rahul, was visibility in the region.

Dr Kliem, who agreed with the assertion, added that where the EU could really add value to the region was in playing to its strengths, and stepping outside the United States' shadow, else be condemned to suffer a visibility deficit. "Its strengths are not in its military power. It should capitalise on its soft power and be a successful example of multilateralism."

The second day ended with the second ambassadorial session with New Zealand Ambassador to Asean **H.E. Stuart Calman**, who spoke on the strategic context of New Zealand's engagements with the increasingly important Indo-Pacific.

"Since we first became an Asean dialogue partner in 1975, we understood that our prosperity and stability are inextricably linked. And for nearly 50 years, we have worked together to advance the cause of peace and prosperity in the region."

The 35th Asia-Pacific Roundtable reconvenes for its third and final day tomorrow, and will feature discussions on the rising spectre of nuclear disarmament on the region and the growing impact of major power unilateralism on Asean's multilateralism.

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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