

The 6th MASK Network Annual Seminar

Opening Remarks by

H.E. Yeo Seung-bae,

Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Malaysia

- 13 Dec 2022, The Westin Kuala Lumpur -

Distinguished Members of Malaysia Scholars on Korea Network,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Selamat Pagi, Salam Sejahtera,

It is my great pleasure to open the MASK Seminar today. I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia for organizing today's event, and I also want to thank all the esteemed speakers and participants for sharing your time with us today.

The MASK Seminar has been held annually since 2017, but I think the seminar holds much more significance this time. Firstly, this year we saw new governments put in place both in Korea and Malaysia. Secondly, as we commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Look East Policy next year, the seminar gives us an opportunity to look back on the progress we have made so far and exchange views on how to move forward for the next 40 years. It will be timely and meaningful for us to deepen our understanding of each other's policies and share ideas on how to promote cooperation in the relevant areas.

Over the years, Malaysia Scholars on Korea network have greatly contributed to enhancing the bilateral ties by actively engaging in

academic discussions and providing many practical recommendations. I really appreciate your contributions and I am looking forward to another productive discussion today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

ASEAN is Korea's key partner as it is the second-largest trade, investment and infrastructure cooperation partner. The Indo-pacific region has strategically important sea lanes, including the Strait of Malacca, through which almost half of all global maritime shipping passes. Therefore, peace and stability in this region are not only important for ASEAN, but also equally important for Korea.

During the ASEAN-ROK Summit in November, President Yoon Suk-yeol presented Korea's 'Indo-Pacific Strategy' and the 'Korea-ASEAN Solidarity Initiative'. When outlining the new foreign policy framework, President Yoon stressed that "ASEAN is one of the most important cooperative partners in promoting Korea's Indo-Pacific strategy." This message clearly signifies the government's strong commitment to strengthen the existing ties and build a even stronger partnership with ASEAN. It also demonstrates the government's determination to strengthen the strategic cooperation with ASEAN member countries in the security area. In this vein, the president proposed a plan to upgrade ties with ASEAN to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

Malaysia, strategically located in the Strait of Malacca, a waterway connecting the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, is the natural partner for Korea to realize its foreign policy initiative. Malaysia is Korea's 3rd largest trading partner in ASEAN after Vietnam and Singapore, and we enjoy a long-standing friendship built upon mutual support extended to each other on a bilateral and multilateral level.

Moreover, next year is going to be a very special year. The Look East Policy was launched 40 years ago to benchmark the economic success of Korea and Japan. The main focus thus far has been put on human capital development and industrial cooperation. Now is the right time to upgrade the policy. I am sure the new Prime Minister Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim is well aware of the value of the Look East Policy more than anyone else, since he was the Deputy Prime Minister during the 1990s. I hope that PM Anwar's comeback will be a big help for the future of the Look East Policy.

I believe that the Look East Policy can also be upgraded in line with the Korea-ASEAN Solidarity Initiative. Korea-ASEAN Solidarity Initiative aims to promote mutually beneficial cooperation in the next-generation sectors such as digital transformation, green transition, and climate response in which ASEAN countries also have keen interest. In fact, many Korean companies are already ramping up their investments in Malaysia, especially in the areas of high-tech industry and carbon neutrality, which include semiconductors, EV batteries, smart cities and smart farming, green hydrogen, carbon capture and storage, and renewable energy. As Malaysia is ahead of its ASEAN neighbors in terms of carbon commitment and is very active in attracting ESG-compliant high-tech investments, I believe that there is ample space for cooperation between Korea and Malaysia in these sectors.

Culture is another area with great potential for collaboration. Since I came to Malaysia one month and a half ago, I could feel the immense popularity of the Korean Wave particularly among the young Malaysians. Interest to learn about each other is not limited to the cultural sector. It could also lead us to cooperate in a whole new area that we never thought of before such as the creative industry. As we are going to discuss cultural diplomacy in our second session today, I look forward to your insights on how we can turn this huge interest and friendliness between our two peoples into mutually beneficial cooperation.

However, these are only few potential areas for the future cooperation. As such, we need to continue to expand areas of cooperation and upgrade our policy framework by reflecting these developments. With the efforts, we can transform our relationship from learning partners to strategic partners that could achieve peace and prosperity together.

In this regard, I hope that today's discussion will serve as an opportunity to share ideas on how to align Korea's Indo-Pacific Strategy and Korea-ASEAN Solidarity Initiative with Malaysia's upgraded Look East Policy. Today I invite my longtime colleague, Ambassador Lim Sang woo, Coordinator for Indo-Pacific Strategy. As an architect and penholder of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, he knows it better than anyone else in Korea. I am certain that his presentation will give us an excellent opportunity to have a better understanding of Korean policies.

Once again, I would like to thank members of MASK for your dedication and support in advancing Korea-Malaysia relations, and I look forward to your continuous help and advice for the next 40 years to come.

Sekian, terima kasih.