



Welcoming Remarks
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Building Closer Malaysia and South Korea ties through Challenges of the 21st Century

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The Westin Kuala Lumpur

0930 – 0938

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His Excellency, Mr Yeo Sung-bae,
Ambassador of Republic of Korea to Malaysia,

Members from the Malaysia Scholars on Korea Network,

Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

1. It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the 2022 Malaysia Scholars on Korea (MASK) Network event titled '**Building Stronger Ties: Malaysia-South Korea Relations through the 21st Century**'. At the outset, I wish to convey my gratitude to the Republic of Korea Embassy in Malaysia, for the ongoing support and partnership to drive conversations on bilateral and strategic issues.
2. This year would mark the fifth year since the Malaysia Scholars on Korea Network - also known as MASK Network - was formed under the auspices of an MoU between ISIS Malaysia and the Republic of Korea Embassy in Malaysia. Since then, the network of academics, teachers and think tankers have congregated to explore questions for South Korea and Malaysia.
3. For instance, in 2017, the launch of the network was accompanied by a discussion on the possibility of a Malaysia-Republic of Korea Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. In 2018 and 2019, activities were spurred by the 'peace, prosperity and people' pillars highlighted in the New Southern Policy for forums in 2018 and 2019 on Korean Peninsula and in-depth



discussions on Malaysia-South Korea bilateral relations, following President Moon Jae-in's visit to Malaysia.

4. The pandemic years tested traditional forms of engagements. The 60th Malaysia-South Korea anniversary was celebrated in a virtual forum, though discussions are no less vibrant on present and future issues such as maritime security, science diplomacy and Smart City cooperation.
5. Last year, as both Malaysia and South Korea looked into post-pandemic recovery, the hybrid forum looked at collaborations, whether it is for vaccine diplomacy or major power competition.
6. This year, like many countries, Malaysia and South Korea have begun to open up borders and open up their economies. However, as we approach 2023, and amidst the establishment of new administrations in both countries, we continue to face turbulent waters consisting of geopolitics and slowdowns in the global economy, that will continue to test the resolve and resilience of both countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

7. The world post-pandemic is both familiar and foreign. Familiar because geopolitics post-pandemic is still shaped by two major powers where the US and China are still [primary drivers of global growth](#). China is the No 1 trading partner of most nations in the world while [the dollar remains the world's dominant reserve currency](#). Further, both stimulate international growth whether it is through defense engagements, infrastructure development or trade and investment.
8. However, the pandemic has left a strong impact on the economy. A cost-of-living crisis is on the horizon and the global economy is expected to slow down further in 2023. Challenges such as climate change continue to threaten our very existence. In addition to that, the pandemic has incubated further major power rivalry.
9. The pandemic illustrated the vulnerabilities of globalisation where closed borders and reliance on foreign markets impact the resilience of a nation's economy. While the effect of this is expected to recover with increased collaborations in a post-pandemic world, the interest to increase resilience by, for example, [homeshoring](#) industries, especially against the back-drop of major power rivalry, is imminent.



10. Therefore, the post-pandemic trends also include alliance-building along technological, innovation and industrial supply chains and increasing engagements in Asia, whether these are for security, prosperity or in people-to-people relations. Thus, we would see regional strategies, such as the Indo-Pacific Strategy, becoming important tools for greater bilateral and multilateral cooperation.
11. To this end, we are most grateful to have with us the roleplayers in Session One, who will unpack the strategic outlook of the region. With a special presentation from Mr Lim Sang-woo, coordinator for the Indo-Pacific Strategy Task Force and former Director-General for North American Affairs Bureau, we would be most pleased to hear about the Republic of Korea's recently launched Indo-Pacific Strategy and the strategic outlook for Malaysia and the region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

12. Conversations on regional strategies would not be the only session in our forum. The year 2023 is also the celebration of Malaysia and Republic of Korea's 40th Look East Policy anniversary. The policy that is an anchor to Malaysia's long and stable bilateral relationships with the East Asian region and would have to address 21st Century challenges as it aims to deepen ties with partners.
13. The Look East Policy relationship is said to mark Republic of Korea's [third longest with a South East Asian country](#), and relations have grown along industrial and vocational training, capacity building of mid-career officials from the Malaysian government and closer ties between educational training and research institutions. The imprint of South Korea in Malaysia is physically marked by major projects in Malaysia, such as one of the Twin Towers and the Penang Bridge.
14. While there is much stability and growth in Malaysia-South Korea relations, a celebration of the Look East Policy could explore newer forms of engagements that could anchor relations.
15. In recent years, ROK-Malaysia relations have grown with educational exchanges, the New Southern Policy and the Korean Wave. A 2021 survey by the ASEAN-Korea Centre stated that Malaysian youths showed the highest interest in Korea, at 97.5% of those interviewed, depicting the successes of some of these exchanges. The engagements along



the lines of the creative economy can grow, especially if creative economic engagement is tied with strategic outcomes.

16. Further are the possibilities to build stronger relationships in achieving Green Goals. These can be in climate change, energy, biodiversity or marine governance. Other areas that could be considered for engagement are on defence and security.

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

17. The Look East Policy celebrating its 40th year is both a cause for celebrations and opportunity.

18. Today's programme takes a look at the 21st Century challenges and potential areas of engagement which can deepen Malaysia-South Korea relations. I am most grateful for the speakers from Malaysia and those who will be joining us virtually from Korea, who would address these challenges together.

19. To that end, I do wish everyone a good conversation, a fruitful discussion and possible idea generation for the future.

Thank you for your kind attention.