

**SPEECH TEXT BY YAB PRIME MINISTER – BRIDGING
FUTURES: STRENGTHENING MALAYSIA-CHINA RELATIONS
AND ASEAN CENTRALITY IN A SHIFTING GLOBAL ORDER**

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SPEECH BY DATO' SERI ANWAR IBRAHIM

PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA

AT PEKING UNIVERSITY

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Distinguished faculty members and students,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Of course, it is a rare honour to address you today at Peking University, a beacon of China's intellectual life. From the cusp of the twentieth century to the present, this institution has nurtured generations of leaders and visionaries, poets and dreamers, builders and innovators – people who have contributed to China's remarkable journey and inspired new possibilities for the future.

It was here that the members of the May Fourth Movement were ignited, sparking a nationwide call for renewal and independence. Within these walls, the foundations of a confident, rising China were laid, leaving an enduring legacy for this vast nation.

And it is from this very place that I believe President Xi Jinping's vision of a "strong, democratic, civilised, harmonious, and modern socialist country" by 2049 will ultimately be realised.

As the Song dynasty poet Lu You wrote, 山重水复疑无路，柳暗花明又一村 (Shan Chong Shui Fu/Yi Wu Lu/ Liu An Hua Ming/ You Yi Chun) – "After mountains and rivers that seemed to have no end, there is a bright village amid the shade of willows and flowers." In choosing to establish relations with China, we moved past the

seemingly unending mountains and rivers of ideological obstacles. We made a conscious choice to step beyond past prejudices and uncertainties. What we found on the other hand was a place of shared purpose and partnership.

Since then, our relations has deepened and matured, reaching a milestone in 2013 with the establishment of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. This spans political, economic, cultural, and defence ties, and embodies the trust and shared vision that binds our two nations. The partnership is further strengthened by the alignment between China's Belt and Road Initiative and Malaysia's MADANI Economic Framework.

This shared vision highlights our commitment to inclusive and sustainable development. The MADANI framework is rooted in the welfare and dignity of our people, prioritising social justice, economic resilience, and sustainability.

Our alignment goes beyond economic interests to embrace a shared philosophy. Malaysia's MADANI vision and China's Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, and Global Civilisation Initiative reflect common principles of equitable growth, stability, and respect for diversity.

In governance, Malaysia and China are decidedly on common ground. Both our nations are united in the conviction that good governance is both a moral imperative and the foundation of prosperity. We stand together in

our commitment to combat corruption and to ensure that the benefits of growth reach everyone, not just a select few.

The economic partnership between Malaysia and China has flourished over the decades. Since 2009, China has been Malaysia's largest trading partner, and in 2023 alone, trade between our countries accounted for over 17 per cent of Malaysia's total trade.

Our partnership extends far beyond traditional industries, encompassing sectors with high potential for innovation and growth. Malaysia and China are working closely to enhance collaboration in the digital economy, green energy, artificial intelligence and the semiconductor industry.

The Belt and Road Initiative has become central to our infrastructure and development landscape. Large-scale projects like the East Coast Rail Link are set to be transformative, while stimulating regional economic growth and creating new opportunities for businesses and communities alike.

In education, I alluded to both scholars, we see the fruits of collaboration between Chinese and Malaysian universities. While pursuing academic excellence, this collaboration will further enhance cross-cultural exchange and appreciation of cultural bonds and ties to enrich the bond of friendship and trust.

So, President, I'll certainly support the idea of extending the collaboration, over leading university or research, science and culture with our universities.

As Malaysia prepares to assume the role of ASEAN Chair in 2025, we are keenly aware of the responsibility this entails. ASEAN has evolved into a region of 671 million people with a combined GDP of \$3.8 trillion, making it the fifth-largest economy in the world.

The complexities of our global landscape require ASEAN to take on new roles and responsibilities. In 2025, our Chairmanship theme of "Inclusivity and Sustainability" reflects a vision of ASEAN where all members, regardless of size or economic capacity, benefit from growth and development.

To achieve this, Malaysia will champion the principle of ASEAN centrality. This is a concept that places ASEAN at the heart of regional peace, security and economic cooperation.

ASEAN centrality is the foundation that allows our region to interact constructively with global powers while maintaining our independence and promoting regional stability. Centrality means that no nation, no matter how big should unilaterally dictate what another nation should or should not do, or how it must or must not act.

Centrality also means that no member should establish distinct self-serving cartels or inward looking mini-laterals that would only serve to perpetuate the vested interests of their members at the expense of others.

Above all, ASEAN centrality can only be maintained if Southeast Asia is cohesive and united. Malaysia recognises this, and as Chair, we will work tirelessly to strengthen ASEAN's cohesion, ensuring that all voices are heard, and that collective decision making comes first. In this, we seek the support of all our Dialogue Partners – whether near or far, large or small – to help keep ASEAN united and strong.

ASEAN centrality has underscored the importance of ASEAN's collective responsibility, as the humanitarian impacts extend across the region. As the incoming ASEAN Chair, Malaysia is fully committed to fostering collaborative engagement with fellow ASEAN member states, key Dialogue Partners and international organisations to pursue a path toward peace and de-escalation in Myanmar.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

China's Belt and Road Initiative, which spans across Southeast Asia, represents an unprecedented opportunity for regional integration. Through infrastructure projects that link our nations – railways, ports, and digital infrastructure – the BRI is reshaping the economic landscape of our region.

For ASEAN, these developments align well with our commitment to enhancing connectivity and inclusive development across member states, ensuring that all countries, from the largest to the smallest, benefit from the wave of progress.

ASEAN-China relations also reflect our shared commitment to innovation and emerging technologies. No doubt, in many ways unprecedented and miraculous, China has achieved remarkable strides in digital transformation, artificial intelligence (AI) and green energy. But more profoundly, the leadership's passion for equitable distribution—championing the rights of every single citizen and prioritizing the welfare of the very poor and marginalized—is truly admirable. This will certainly be discussed and reflected in my meeting tonight with President Xi Jinping. China's progress is indeed remarkable, not only in terms of digital transformation and economic success, but also in its dedication to addressing the root causes of poverty, particularly abject poverty.

In 2025, Malaysia will initiate a trilateral forum involving ASEAN, Gulf Cooperation Council (Arab Countries), and China which will introduce a unique dimension to ASEAN-China relations. This platform aims to expand ASEAN's partnerships and recognise the Gulf region's growing significance in global trade and geopolitics.

By linking ASEAN, China, and the GCC, we can bridge, we can build a bridge between East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East, enabling deeper economic, cultural, and strategic ties among our regions, which will contribute to creating a shared vision for cooperation on global challenges

such as energy security, sustainable development and economic diversification.

As we look toward strengthening ASEAN-China relations and Malaysia's upcoming ASEAN Chairmanship, it is essential that we draw inspiration from the principles that guide our cooperation. On this score, I would like to note that I am deeply moved by President Xi Jinping's steadfast commitment to fairness and justice.

I made a reference in my speech in Shanghai about President Xi Jinping's speech at Kazan, BRICS forum which is unique in the sense and particularly for the young to understand the leaders not only talk about global security, global development, justice, good governance, but talking about shared future, about having the capacity and the resolve to understand the need to uplift living standards of people throughout the world and coupling with the central issue of civilization and culture. You name it, which other leader articulates the vision for the future while trying to understand civilization, values and culture. That is why I feel certainly comfortable in exchanges with the President for his foresight and vision.

I remember his address marking the 70th anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, President Xi Jinping emphasised that: "China advocates the vision of global governance featuring extensive consultation and joint contribution for shared benefit, and China believes in true multilateralism."

Now, this consistent articulation of a shared future underscores the imperative for a global security and prosperity. And this is contrary to what we have been told and and seen the repetitiousness, the endemic corruption and the arrogance of power, the talk about unilateralism and gross injustice perpetrated against people and the worse of course, if you see daily in Gaza, this vision is what the world needs. The deficit is of course, the deficit of humanity, of values, of respect for culture and civilization. So this articulation to me is a most opportune time considering that there is so much trust deficit, racism, phobias, protectionism and unilateralism confronting the world today.

As for shared prosperity, no one can deny that China has the moral high ground to advocate, to advocate the principle shared future on account that its remarkable achievement in eradicating extreme poverty has earned global recognition.

In Malaysia, addressing socio-economic inequality has been the top priority of this Government. We share China's belief that the true measure of national progress is the well-being of all citizens, particularly the most vulnerable.

And these achievements are attained on a platform dedicated to the pursuit of global peace and harmony with repeated emphasis on the crucial importance of a society rich in culture and ethnic diversity.

This vision is one we deeply share in Malaysia and ASEAN – a vision of a balanced global order where nations, regardless of size or might, find

security and prosperity through cooperation and mutual respect. President Xi's words capture the essence of the partnership we strive to build: one rooted in inclusivity, fairness, and a commitment to principles over power.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We therefore need to work together to build a deeper, more mature partnership, one that celebrates achievements and values open, constructive dialogue. Real progress happens when we move beyond words to actions that foster trust and address shared challenges.

Allow me to end by reiterating that there here are profound lessons that we can learn from China's experience in economic development, geopolitics, and international diplomacy. China's transformation to becoming a global economic powerhouse offers invaluable insights into the importance of strategic, long-term planning and people-centred policies.

China's balanced approach to geopolitics and its advocacy for multilateralism highlights the value of stability, cooperation, and respect for sovereignty. President Xi's persistent calls for "extensive consultation and joint contribution for shared benefit" embodies a vision of global governance rooted in fairness and collective progress. We, and other global partners can work toward a world where prosperity, security, and peace are achieved not through dominance but through genuine partnership and mutual respect.

Xie Xie.

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