

**SPECIAL ADDRESS BY YAB PRIME MINISTER: KUALA LUMPUR
ROUNDTABLE ON ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL COOPERATION OF
THE BOAO FORUM FOR ASIA “TOWARDS A NEW ERA OF
SOVEREIGN INTERDEPENDENCE”**

By : DATO’ SERI ANWAR IBRAHIM

Venue : SHANGRI-LA KUALA LUMPUR

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SPECIAL ADDRESS BY

THE HONOURABLE DATO’ SERI ANWAR IBRAHIM

PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA

**KUALA LUMPUR ROUNDTABLE ON ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL
COOPERATION OF**

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TOWARDS A NEW ERA OF

SOVEREIGN INTERDEPENDENCE

27th AUGUST 2025 (WEDNESDAY) | 2:00PM

SHANGRI-LA KUALA LUMPUR

Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh dan salam sejahtera.

Saya alu-alukan Menteri Luar, Yang Berhormat Dato' Seri Utama Haji Mohamad bin Haji Hasan;

Mantan Setiausaha Agung PBB dan Pengerusi BAO Forum Asia, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Chairman of Boao Forum for Asia Board;

dan Victor Ho; dan

Rakan-rakan yang saya muliakan.

1. Of course it gives us a great pleasure to welcome Chairman, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon with such impeccable credentials and on behalf of the Malaysian government and people commend you for your stewardship of the United Nations, and thank you and I believe you have a major role to forge this sort of cohesive and collaborative efforts within Asia and Victor Ho and colleagues.

2. Seventy years ago, in the nation city of Bandung, referred to Victor Ho, leaders from 29 nations of Asia and Africa, Zhou Enlai, Nehru, Kwame Nkrumah, under the chairmanship of Sukarno of Indonesia, gathered for the first major conference of the post colonial period. They came from countries newly independent, struggling or some of them struggling of independence. But more importantly, they spoke about sovereignty, dignity, and solidarity. They insisted that the nations of the Global South would not remain spectators in history, but the architects of their own destinies.

3. Those principles still resonate. Bandung taught us that sovereignty and solidarity are not opposites. Instead, they are two sides of the same coin.

4. Today, as we face trade wars and a new age of technological disruption, we must renew that spirit, one with a firm conviction for a new kind of integration.

5. It is the conviction that we can engage the world freely, but on our own terms. It is about striving for sovereign independence or

interdependence, forging partnerships for our choosing, of our own choosing, not ties that are imposed from on high.

6. And ASEAN, as you know, accept this principle of centrality, having that commitment to forge a strong bond within ASEAN countries, engage with our neighbors and friends; China, Korea, Japan, India and Asia continue to enhance relations and trade with the United States, Europe and other countries. That centrality must to work.
7. The global trading system unfortunately is in distress. The World Trade Organisation (WTO), once the guardian of rules, has been left in a state of near-paralysis.
8. Meanwhile, the world's largest economies are no longer custodians of this system, but sometimes, unfortunately are disruptors. Tariffs swing wildly. Export controls are imposed and lifted with little warning. Financial sanctions reach far beyond their intended targets. What was once a web of mutual gain is now a network of vulnerabilities.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

9. We know that today's and in today's fragmented world, economic compartmentalization as once propounded by Joseph Schumpeter can no longer serve the complex interdependent nature of geoeconomics.

10. Unfortunately, we are living through a weaponisation of interdependence. Instead of advancing facilitation, energy pipelines, shipping routes, and semiconductor supply chains now have become instruments of unfair leverage. Payment systems and capital flows are deployed as tools of pressure.
11. Now the result is pervasive uncertainty, a sense of fragility. This is the new reality. We are convened here to discuss the principle of centrality, working together, but we also have to realise and accept the reality of unbridled mercantilism, of generating economic disparities or disruptions.
12. Export restrictions will have profound security and geopolitical implications as well. But history shows us that when nations compete to build walls, prosperity declines and instability spreads. That is precisely the reason why we argue for sovereign interdependence and effective collaboration with all.
13. We are entering a world without a single center of gravity. Some describe this as a new age of geoeconomics, where trade, finance, technology and security no longer run on separate tracks, but converge as points of rivalry. Others call it a return to spheres of influence, where major powers seek to divide the map into zones of control. To my mind, neither path serves the interests of smaller nations.

14. Malaysia and ASEAN, because sovereign interdependence offers another way. It's accepts that interdependence is unavoidable, but insists that it must be built on choice, on resilience and mutual respect. It preserves openness while safeguarding dignity. It rejects both enforced dependence and enforced decoupling.
15. Now Asia's dynamism is clear. While our middle classes are growing, our digital economies are expanding and trade volumes remain resilient fragmentation to real. Demographic headwinds in Northeast Asia, unresolved rivalries across the region, and the risk of polarisation all weigh heavily.
16. If the Asian century is to be realised, it will require deliberate effort converges such as these great minds Mr. Ban Ki-moon and friends to think, to ensure that policies are well coordinated and investment in shared resilience.
17. Now ASEAN offers a model. Built on open, inclusive and non-exclusive regionalism, it remains one of the few groupings where rivals sit together in dialogue. Malaysia is determined to preserve that centrality, not as rhetoric, but as practice that requires deepening the architecture of regional cooperation.
18. This year, ASEAN and China concluded negotiations for the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area 3.0. It will be presented to leaders in October. It now embraces the digital economy, green growth, supply-chain

connectivity, technical standards and support for small and medium-sized enterprises.

19. It reflects the new realities of our time: that prosperity today is shaped not only by fair trade, but also by data flows, by digital platforms and by sustainable energy transitions. For ASEAN, this FTA demonstrates the engagement with China can be rules-based, inclusive and future-oriented.
20. At the same time, we must not neglect the wider architecture of the Asia-Pacific. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership remains the largest free-trade area in the world, covering 30 per cent of the global GDP. But RCEP must not remain a legal text on paper. It must be renewed with political energy.
21. Now, Malaysia intends to convene an RCEP Summit in October, in conjunction with ASEAN Leaders Summit. The aim is to take stock, accelerate implementation, and to demonstrate that Asia can still lead the cause of openness even as others turn inward.

Ladies and gentlemen,

22. We have now new challenges in technology, Artificial Intelligence (AI), automation, digitalization and remaking the world with startling speed. Let us begin, work together as a cohesive team and be determined and remain optimistic and dignified, sometimes a rare

term in politics these days, but I believe and I share your optimism and let us work together to save the region and the world.

Thank you, Terima Kasih.

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