

MALAYSIA, INDIA ARE LEADERS IN ASIA'S NEW EMERGING ORDER

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Arriving in India at the beginning of my six-day visit, I was yet again struck by the many similarities between our two nations.

Malaysia and India have deep and historical ties, going back many centuries. We have both always been trading nations; outward-looking and keen to forge friendships with our neighbours and partners in the region.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of formal diplomatic relations. Malaysia's father of independence, Tunku Abdul Rahman, visited India in 1962 as our first Prime Minister. Before that, while both India and Malaysia were under colonial rule, there was a visit to what was then Malaya by Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, in 1937.

In the years since, both countries have shown their commitment to regional and multilateral forums, through membership of the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Commonwealth, the Group of 15 and the Group of 77 plus China, the Indian Ocean Rim Association – which had its first ever leaders' summit in Jakarta recently – and the East Asia Summit. While through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), we also enjoy a free trade area with India.

Our links are strong.

Since 1998, India has been Malaysia's largest export destination in the South Asian region, and over the last decade or so trade has increased by more than four-fold. India is currently Malaysia's tenth largest trading partner, our seventh largest export destination, and our twelfth largest source of imports.

India is also currently Malaysia's twentieth largest investor, with total investment worth \$2.31 billion. Malaysia, meanwhile, is ranked as the twenty-first largest foreign investor in India globally, and the second largest from ASEAN.

But our relationship is not just about trade and economics. Indeed, it is one that is deeply personal.

I myself have been to India on a number of occasions: having undertaken an official visit to India in January 2010, and visited again in December 2012 to attend the ASEAN-India Special Commemorative Summit in New Delhi. We have also welcomed Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Malaysia in November 2015, when we elevated our two countries' relationship to be an Enhanced Strategic Partnership.

Over the course of his visit, we inaugurated the Torana Gate – a gift from India to Malaysia that serves as a vibrant symbol of our friendship, while also providing a new landmark in our capital Kuala Lumpur – for tourists and locals to marvel at its intricate carvings and stunning design.

The site chosen for the Torana Gate is in an area known as "Little India". Now, there are many cities around the world with similarly named locales. It has a special resonance in Malaysia, however, for our relationship is almost like family. So it is appropriate that our bond is growing across a broad spectrum of sectors, including trade, education, health, defence, security, tourism – even our shared love of Bollywood films!

For Malaysia has the highest percentage of the Indian diaspora outside India, with fully 7% of our population being of Indian origin.

And these Malaysian Indians have played a vital role in building our country. Even before independence, it was the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) that was the third member of the Alliance Coalition, which went on to form the first government of independent Malaysia, and which was the forerunner of today's Barisan Nasional Government.

Malaysian Indians have always been at the forefront of governance in Malaysia; of our civil service, business, entertainment, education, and of course, food – which as you may know, is very important to Malaysians!

Malaysian Indians are a crucial part of our unique diversity, and their cultures and faiths help make up the rich and varied tapestry of our nation – many races and religions, but 1Malaysia.

Indeed, Malaysian Indians have helped us keep growth on track, at 4.2% last year. They have helped us keep unemployment and inflation low, create millions of new jobs, and build a society that is sustainable, inclusive and heading towards high income status nation – a nation at ease with itself and with its neighbours.

I can truly say that without Malaysian Indians, Malaysia simply would not be what it is today, and they constitute a very special reason why it is so natural for our two countries to forge ever closer and friendlier relations.

On a people-to-people basis, that friendship is already there. Thousands of our citizens are studying in each others' countries, while we welcome hundreds of thousands of Indian tourists every year. Malaysian companies are involved in some very important infrastructure projects in India, and many major Indian businesses are well-established in Malaysia.

On security, we are firm partners. Both governments are committed to combating violent extremism, and neither will give an inch to those who would bring terror and destruction to our streets.

But on these, and other areas, we want to work even more closely together. In this, the Asian Century, India and Malaysia have so much to offer each other, the region, and beyond – as examples of moderate, civilised, peaceful countries that prize education, the safety and well-being of our peoples, and the equitable and sustainable pursuit of growth.

Both our countries are already recognised as leaders in the new emerging order in Asia and the world. Let us continue to work together to build a future based on stability, prosperity and understanding as the centre of the globe moves inexorably to East.

It is always a pleasure to be here in India. I hope that on this visit, our family-like bonds will grow even stronger, for the benefit of both our countries and both our peoples.

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