

Speech at The High-Level Meeting of Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation

By : YAB. TUN DR. MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD, PERDANA MENTERI MALAYSIA

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1. Firstly, I would like to thank the organisers for this invitation to the most important forum – a forum on the passages between East and West, a forum that will bring East and West closer together. For centuries man had searched for passages for travel and trade between countries and continents. The most remarkable finding and development was the land passage from China in the East to Eastern Europe in the West. This land passage became known as the Silk Road. Caravans of camels and horses took months to move trade goods and people along this great passageway. But so enriching was the trade that men were ready to walk and ride long distances for months to profit from this route.

2. At sea the passage was through the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea. Tea and silk and lacquer from the East were carried on fragile sailing ships to exchange for less valuable Western products. Malaysia benefited as the crossroad for this sea traffic.

3. Today trade drives the world. It is only natural that the land and sea passages have to be better developed. Without doubts the utilisation of these passages will enrich all the littoral states along the way, as much as the great nations of the East and West.

4. We noticed that when the demand for petroleum in the East grew, bigger and bigger tankers were built, some almost half a million tonnes. The geographical location of the passage became strategic to the nations of the East and West. Singapore at the tip of the Asian Continent prospered.

5. But while the increases in the volume of trade enrich the trading partners, the threats to the littoral states have unfortunately increased. Oil spills and dumping of waste at sea pollute the shores of these states. But these are designated international waters and the littoral states cannot collect tolls to finance the work of cleaning up.

6. If we designate the Straits of Malacca as international then the international community must assume responsibility for keeping the seas clear and unpolluted. But so far the responsibility falls on the littoral states. They are the ones to suffer pollution and they have to maintain a sizeable force to clean up the sea and their shores. It does not seem fair that the poor littoral states should be burdened with this responsibility.

7. The Silk Road, the land passage between East and West, has not received much attention. Yet it must be obvious that with modern technologies the passage can be improved.

8. Just as the massive trade by ships has spawned the development of huge bulk carriers, the land passage should also respond to the need of the increased trade between East and West. Although trains can now connect China with Eastern Europe but current trains are not designed for the increases in goods and people needing to travel along this passageway.

9. If ships can be built bigger, why cannot trains be equally big to carry more goods and raw materials and people?

10. Have we reached the limit in terms of the size and length of trains. I think not. If the rail gauge is widened, cannot we build bigger trains? Cannot we have longer trains, maybe a kilometre long?

11. Then there is this improvement in the speed of trains. With all the sensors that are available cannot we build safer fast trains to cope with the increased needs of trade today.

12. Trains can shorten the passage between East and West bringing them closer to each other. They are faster than ships.

13. We have the technology and the money to bring about these improvements. As the sea routes and land routes improve, trade and travel will grow and with this the wealth of the world will increase for the betterment of everyone.

14. Yes, the Belt and Road idea is great. It can bring the land locked countries of Central Asia closer to the sea. They can grow in wealth and their poverty reduced. Everyone will benefit from the ease of travel and communication that the development of the Belt and Road project will bring.

15. An essential element is the freedom of passage along these routes. A Passageway is only as good as the freedom it provides. Both the sea and the land routes will pass through many countries. Bureaucratic hassles will slow the speed of travel. It is essential therefore for these passages be free and open to all.

16. Modern technology with the ease of data collection, of artificial intelligences and wireless communication should enable monitoring and checking to be done without the need for physical inspection. With these

technologies much time would be saved. And accordingly the growth in the usage of the passages will be rapid.

17. The passages must be safe. Terrorism and wars will make these modern marvels incapable of delivering the benefits they promise.

18. The world claims to be civilised. But these civilised people still resort to killing each other to resolve problems. Their capacity to destroy is far greater than their capacity to build. It is imperative that the world become less primitive and reject the use of force and massacres in order to benefit from the opening up of new passages for trade and freight that the Belt and Road initiative promises.

19. I am fully in support of the Belt and Road initiative. I am sure my country, Malaysia, will benefit from the project.

Thank you.

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