

OPENING REMARKS PUTRAJAYA FORUM 2016
Grand Ballroom, Hotel Sunway Putra, Kuala Lumpur
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YAB. DATO' SRI MOHD NAJIB BIN TUN HAJI ABDUL RAZAK,
PERDANA MENTERI MALAYSIA

Bismillahirrahmanirahim

Assalamualakum w.b.t and a very good afternoon.

The Honourable Dato' Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein, Minister of Defence Malaysia,

Honourable Ministers,

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Malaysian Government and the people of Malaysia, let me wish you all a warm "Selamat Datang". I would like to express my special thanks to our Ministerial guests who are going to deliver their respective countries' perspectives today.

This will be a very valuable contribution to our discussions on your theme for this afternoon - Regional Cooperation in Addressing Security Challenges.

This is a timely subject, as countries around the world are being increasingly challenged by potential threats, conventional and non- conventional.

While non-traditional security threats have been making the headlines of late - such as the recent attacks in Paris, Istanbul and Brussels - the possibility of conventional threats has not entirely disappeared.

Developments in the South China Sea - in terms of territorial disputes and freedom of navigation - the potential for nuclear escalation in the Korean Peninsula; and further destabilisation in the Middle East, remain global concerns.

Neither has the age-old scourge of sea robbery and piracy been consigned to history. We recently had the despicable kidnapping of Malaysian citizens off the coast of Sabah. Two major incidents involving Malaysian registered tankers – the MT Orkim Harmony and the MT Orkim Victory – in the middle of last year were warnings to us all.

It was only through working together with neighbouring countries that we successfully located the hijacked vessels, which shows why we must continue to improve our communication, coordination and cooperation in the region and beyond.

The Malacca Straits Patrol initiative which brings together Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand has proved a useful mechanism in those seas, and perhaps such mechanisms can be set up to address maritime security challenges in other strategic waterways in the region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

That brings me to my main point. We must not take for granted the regional stability that we have enjoyed. The hard work of our forefathers in establishing and building ASEAN has contributed enormously to peace.

And the concept of the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality, or ZOPFAN, which was adopted in 1971, remains the fundamental pillar for the establishment of the ASEAN Political and Security Community. The ZOPFAN principles are as relevant as ever.

We have come a long way by adopting the ASEAN way. A major development that further strengthened our collective capabilities was the establishment of a regional forum through the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting, or ADMM. This came into being as a result of the ASEAN Security Plan of Action adopted in 2004 in Vientiane.

I have a special interest in the ADMM, as I had the honour of chairing the inaugural meeting in Kuala Lumpur in 2006. Since then ADMM has helped tremendously in promoting practical military-to-military cooperation across the region, and building trust and confidence in each others' forces.

Four years later the ADMM Plus was formed, in which the spirit of friendly openness that ASEAN displays towards its dialogue partners is clearly displayed. And that is very important. For ASEAN on its own cannot guarantee peace in our region. We need the support of our friends and partners.

The ADMM Plus mechanism plays a critical role in balancing major power influence in the region, as it is a platform that allows practical military cooperation to take place involving the middle- and super-powers of the world.

It addresses regional defence and security challenges – including Maritime Security, Counter Terrorism, Peace Keeping Operations, Humanitarian and Disaster

Relief, Military Medicine, Humanitarian Mine Actions and, soon, Cyber Security. And it does so putting regional values and interests first.

These mechanisms will help guide us in the decades to come, long after ASEAN turns 50 next year.

But, ladies and gentlemen,

We must work in tandem with neighbours and friends beyond national boundaries, and across continents. If the past saw us dealing with transnational crime in isolation, the present demands that we make international security and trans-boundary crime our mutual business.

For we are faced with new security threats that recognise no borders. There are cyber terrorists who can operate with ease across any firewalls that individual countries put up. More immediately, there are extremists who do not accept the legitimacy of states; who can radicalise from afar – and who seem to slip with too much ease into the lands they wish to bring death and destruction to.

Stepping up inter-agency cooperation is vital. Any rivalries and squabbling over jurisdictions and turfs must belong to the past. There is too much at stake. In this challenging time of economic uncertainty, governments are forced to optimise the use of resources.

Malaysia has set an example by adopting the National Blue Ocean Strategy, which encourages inter-agency cooperation and collaboration. As it is, the Malaysian Armed Forces and the Royal Malaysian Police have a long history of working together, not least in fighting Communist insurgencies between the early 60s to the late 80s.

We have also collaborated with the private sector, involving the Malaysian International Shipping Cooperation in a cost-saving initiative where civilian-purpose vessels were converted to grey hulls with military personnel on board to provide protection along the troubled waters of the Gulf of Aden between 2008-2013.

More recently, another successful private-government security enterprise was the "Eyes in the Sky" programme that we began under the Malacca Straits Patrol Initiative. It involved PETRONAS and the Malaysian Armed Forces using old oil rigs owned by PETRONAS, which were then converted into forward operating bases in the sea for the security forces to monitor the Malaysian Maritime Zone.

To meet the demands placed on us all by defence and security challenges these days, we need this more comprehensive approach, underscored by a spirit of openness and inclusiveness.

Just as importantly, we must embrace the fact that defence and security is no longer the business of governments alone, but of all stakeholders who have common interests and goals - above all the regional security and stability which is a prerequisite for prosperity, safety and growth.

On that note, I wish you all the best in your discussions, and my congratulations once again to MIDAS for organising the Forum.

I now declare the Putrajaya Forum 2016 open.

Thank you.