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***TOWARDS A RISING GLOBAL SOUTH:
LEVERAGING ON MALAYSIA-INDIA TIES***

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Prolegomenon

1. It is an honour and privilege to speak to you today, here in a land of blessing and peace, described by poets, philosophers and sages with nothing less than the most richly textured of words.
2. Permit me therefore to quote from the renowned philosopher and spiritual leader Swami Vivekananda, no less than the chief disciple of the great Ramakrishna: “Even earlier, when history has no record, and tradition dares not peer into the gloom of that intense past, even from then until now, ideas after ideas have marched out from her, but every word has been spoken with a blessing behind it and peace before it.”

3. I am delighted at the opportunity to speak at Sapru House, which has not only housed notable architects of foreign policy but was also regularly frequented by independent India's first leader, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. It reminds me of the deep friendship that Pandit Nehru shared with Malaysia's first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman. Their camaraderie built on trust and shared values formed the foundation of almost seven decades of our bilateral ties, ties that have remained strong and unmoved.
4. Today in this era of uncertainty, we look back at our leaders' legacies and we see how their ideas and efforts at shaping norms have reverberated throughout the region and resonate with us now, more than ever.
5. "Whither do we go and what shall be our endeavour?" As we all know, that is the question that Pandit Nehru posed in his *A Tryst With Destiny* speech, and so succinctly answered: "To bring freedom and opportunity to the common man, to the peasants and workers of India; to fight and end poverty and ignorance and disease; to build up a prosperous, democratic and progressive nation, and to create social, economic and political institutions which will ensure justice and fullness of life to every man and woman."

6. In a world fraught with challenges and uncertainties, it is the unwavering commitment to these principles that will guide us towards a brighter, more just tomorrow. The legacy of the founding fathers is not merely a testament to their time, but a timeless beacon, urging us to dream, to strive, and to forge ahead with undaunted courage and unshakeable resolve.

The Global South

Friends and colleagues,

7. Keeping the theme of my lecture in mind, let me begin with the assertion that the Global South represents the reclaiming of a voice that can no longer be ignored in the emerging international order. As a driver of global prosperity, the Global South today accounts for roughly 40% of world GDP and around 85% of the world's population. By 2030, three of the four largest economies will be from the Global South – one of them of course, being India.
8. The resurgence of Global South narratives and the desire for greater participation in the international system has pushed regional powers to the forefront, with opportunities to exert agency and shape the discourse around what a Global South agenda should look like.

9. Indeed, at this geopolitical juncture where strategic uncertainties and anxieties are commonplace, anchoring ourselves to pursuing a common, collective good with level playing fields for all should be the ultimate goal of a Global South agenda.

10. An empowered Global South, as I see it, is inevitable. There are now real opportunities to push the envelope on addressing global challenges on terms that we can set in consultation with one another. And this of course, on pressing issues that we are all still finding our footing on – climate change, supply chain resilience, food security and Artificial Intelligence governance.

11. On the part of Malaysia, we believe that the rise of the Global South unites us in all our diversity, differences and discretions. The Global South, despite overwhelmingly negative connotations from detractors, is not meant to exclude the Global North. In fact, Global South mobilisation is predicated on the acceptance of our growing agency and the desire to work together as equals within our complex strategic contexts.

12. And to me, India has welcomed this reality with grace, fore-vision, and most importantly, a plan. India's excellent G20 Chairmanship last year and the inaugural Voice of Global South Summits made it amply clear that India is prepared to shape the Global South agenda with its partners, hand in hand. In fact, Malaysia also shares the pride of the African Union's inclusion into the G20 and is deeply cognisant of the immense value these partners and regions bring to the table.

Enhancing Strategic Partnership

13. While we have made significant strides in our bilateral cooperation, there is still much room for further strengthening. It was with that in mind that Prime Minister Modi and I earlier today agreed to elevate our ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. This will give due recognition to our shared priorities of connectivity, sustainable economic growth, green development, technological transformation, and delivery of public goods.

14. As we look forward to closer ties between our two nations, it would do us good to take stock of the progress we have made in recent years, and nowhere is this more evident than in the realm of trade.

Trade

15. Today, trade between Malaysia and India stands at US\$16.5 billion, bolstered by an impressive compounded annual growth rate of 8.5% in the last two decades. This growth trajectory is not just a statistic but a testament to the deepening economic linkages facilitated by frameworks such as the Malaysia-India Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement and the ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement.
16. Moreover, the evolution of trade composition between our nations mirrors the broader economic transformations within Malaysia and India. Two decades ago, palm oil and petroleum products dominated Malaysia's exports to India, making up nearly two-thirds of the total. However, as Malaysia's economy has diversified, so too has our trade portfolio. Today, these primary commodities account for just one-third of exports to India, with electrical and electronics products, becoming key export items. This shift underscores Malaysia's transition towards higher-value-added industries.
17. From the Indian perspective, there has also been a marked change. Previously, India's exports to Malaysia were concentrated in meat, dairy, and cereals, but now, petroleum products and engineering goods have emerged as the largest components of Malaysia's imports from India. This diversification highlights India's growing industrial capacity, a

development complemented by the aforementioned economic frameworks, which have reduced trade barriers and facilitated smoother trade flows.

18. Of course, this is an understatement when one considers that India's nominal GDP is expected to outpace Japan's by 2025, and Germany's by 2030 as it advances on its trajectory to become the third largest economy in the world.
19. Clearly, both Malaysia and India have come a long way in our economic partnership. The transformation in trade dynamics is not just reflective of our growing economic capabilities but also of the strategic agreements that have underpinned this growth. With such foundational elements of our trade relationship, the road ahead is highly promising, offering vast opportunities for further economic collaboration and growth.

Geo-economics

20. Indeed, there is much scope for us to capitalise on each other's capabilities in the high-tech sector – for instance, both our countries have considerable potential to deepen integration in the semiconductor industry. Malaysia is already the world's sixth largest semiconductor exporter. Our country's expertise lies particularly in the assembly, testing, and packaging segments of the semiconductor value chain

whereas India's capabilities in software are almost unparalleled, its engineers being among the most skilled and sought after the world over. This comes as no surprise considering India's leadership in digital public infrastructure development. Nonetheless, while others may see divergent capabilities between Malaysia and India, I see the makings of a vibrant symbiosis.

21. I do not exaggerate when I say that stronger Malaysia-India ties are consequential to a better-connected Global South. As one of the best-connected Southeast Asian countries to India by air, Malaysia is strategically positioned to encourage seamless movement between our regions for business, education and tourism. We are also cognisant of India's efforts at connecting to Southeast Asia by road and look forward to the early operationalisation of the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway which will be of value to Malaysia as well.
22. In addition, our joint membership in the Indian Ocean Rim Association gives us the opportunity to push for change and development. I must at this time, commend India for leading the drafting of the IORA's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific which I am sure will contextualise and put our efforts in perspective.

23. On the topic of international cooperation, we must not forget how a defining feature of the international system at this time is minilateralism. Contrary to some views that such arrangements are contentious, Malaysia believes that minilateral mechanisms ultimately work towards the delivery of public goods to benefit our people and raise the standards of living.
24. In that vein, Malaysia will not shy away from exercising agency and participating in these arrangements as we see fit. Our recent application to join BRICS is a fine example. By participating in BRICS, we aim to diversify our economic diplomacy efforts and enhance our collaboration with member countries through shared initiatives and strategic partnerships. India's distinct and influential role within BRICS is of particular importance, as we recognise that our strong bilateral ties will add significant value to the dynamics of the grouping. We are confident that our entry into this group will not only strengthen our economic linkages with India but also open new avenues for cooperation across a broader spectrum of industries and policy areas.

Friends and colleagues,

Regional and sub-regional

25. Let me now turn my attention to our regional and sub-regional mechanisms which will be instrumental in shaping the Global South agenda. As upcoming ASEAN Chair, Malaysia will not only focus on strengthening existing ASEAN mechanisms and institutions, and making them fit for purpose, but also find synergies with other frameworks that are crucial for regional development and prosperity.

26. In this context, India, as one of ASEAN's longstanding Dialogue Partners, plays a pivotal role. The ASEAN-India partnership has been instrumental in fostering economic growth, security cooperation, and cultural exchange across the region. We see great potential in deepening this collaboration, particularly as we seek to align ASEAN's priorities with broader initiatives that support the Global South. By working closely with India and other Dialogue Partners, we can ensure that ASEAN remains at the forefront of regional integration and continues to be a driving force for sustainable development in the region.

27. Secondly, enhanced engagement between ASEAN and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) will not only connect our regions but shed light on challenges, needs and priorities which are not always considered 'mainstream'. These

challenges, which may be rooted in the very geography that shapes our landscapes, the unique demographics that define our populations, or the particular resources that sustain our livelihoods, are the silent yet potent forces that must be acknowledged and addressed.

28. In this endeavour, the essence of the Global South agenda must be nothing less than an intrinsic mobilization — one that is firmly anchored in our shared norms and values, and which honours the extraordinary diversity that characterizes the Global South.

Friends and colleagues,

Interregnum and geopolitics

29. I have made a visit to India in unprecedented times. Competition, rivalry and intense geopolitical flux is now status quo. We live and breathe in an interregnum waiting for life as we know it to stabilise and revert to a phase we are familiar with. But the harsh reality is that institutions and structures that we have known to function and thrive with can no longer respond effectively to the challenges of the day.
30. India as a rising power has shown remarkable resilience and acumen in navigating the geopolitical uncertainties we find ourselves in today. India's unique multi-aligned approach

which requires an astute and adept compartmentalisation of priorities and challenges is worth learning from – especially from the vantage point of a Southeast Asian country at the heart of the emerging Indo-Pacific order.

31. Let me pause to reiterate that the relationship between India and Malaysia is forged on the anvil of robust, vibrant and animated trade, commercial and cultural ties, but above all, fortified through shared experiences, a common goal and thriving on the familial bonds of kinship going back centuries.
32. Our ties possess a formidable power to shape perceptions, a unique dynamic testifying to the extraordinary nature of our connection, one that transcends mere diplomacy and touches the very core of our shared existence.
33. Whereas the Atlantic Ocean must bear the dark history of imperial expansion, gruesome colonisation, and chattel slavery and as the Pacific Ocean world is riddled with tensions and on the epicentre of the renewal of the Cold War, here in the Indian Ocean World we can create a stable and resilient backbone for the global economy.

Inclusivism, ethics and humanity

34. We must say no to the naysayers who contend that multiculturalism, inclusivism and shared prosperity are mere constructs of convenience that are impossible of fulfilment because, as they say, man is an economic animal driven by the instinct of self-preservation and self-aggrandisement.
35. We reject such a notion, one that bears the wretched odour of isolationism and venerates the false gods of exclusivism and protectionism because we believe that no man is an island and no one people can prosper, truly, without the help and cooperation of others.
36. Nevertheless, we cannot be blind to our innate and deep-rooted connections with the Pacific and Atlantic links. We are not in the business of building doors, let alone walls, but in fortifying the bridges that bind.
37. The immortal words of Mahatma Gandhi come to mind: "Hate the sin and not the sinner' is a precept which, though easy enough to understand, is rarely practiced, and that is why the poison of hatred spreads in the world."
38. Looming over us is the menacing threat of extremism in all its myriad forms and the ill-will, rancour and animosity that are

bred from absolute dogmas. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, Jews, Christians, Buddhists – we share histories and origins. We share sources of knowledge and in that common treasury of memories, we vindicate our shared values of truth, of ethics, of humanity and of our innate desire for peace.

39. We must stand against interreligious violence from the aggressions we see every day to the politics of dispossession that violently uproots and displaces millions of Palestinians, and the genocides that continue to unleash the slaughter of thousands of innocent lives. We can all agree, regardless of our backgrounds, that this is certainly neither our higher calling nor the higher purpose of the human race, to put down and destroy one another.

Friends and colleagues,

Closing

40. The road we stand upon will not run smooth. We are poised at the cusp of formidable changes, movements in the world that set it spinning slightly differently with each circum-rotation. And yes, there will always be hazards ahead, hidden in the shadows. But we must resolve to be fearless in facing them, remembering that true greatness lies not in avoiding

the storms of life but in weathering them with unwavering resolve.

41. In our tireless pursuit of a harmonious and just world, where peace reigns and equanimity is our guiding star, we are reminded of the profound wisdom of the illustrious Rabindranath Tagore. His words echo through the corridors of time, urging us to embrace not the comforts of safety, but the unyielding courage to confront adversity head long: “Let me not pray to be sheltered from dangers, but to be fearless in facing them.”

42. In this haven for architects of thought, where the very air thrums with the energy of that unceasing task which is nation-building, let us resolve to forge a future together that is illuminated by the brilliance of our shared endeavours, with unwavering commitment to the ideals that define us.

Thank you.
