

VERBATIM TRANSCRIPTION

**ASEAN- EVEN STRONGER TOGETHER (ASEAN
PLENARY)**

**BY YAB PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA TO THE
WORLD ECONOMY FORUM ANNUAL MEETING, DAVOS,
SWITZERLAND**

22 JANUARY 2025

Question 1:

Can you share with us your vision for your chairmanship of ASEAN and as we said, can ASEAN even work closer together and achieve more that way? also your single market has huge potential, Prime Minister. Let's give the Prime Minister and warm applause for coming back after 13 years.

Answer:

Thank you. May I reiterate this point to suggest that we are fortunate to be in the region, relatively most peaceful and fastest growing economy, very pragmatic policies, but we're

able to do that primarily because the relations and the trust among leaders is exemplary. I'm not exaggerating but I don't find that sort of level of trust and friendship among countries engaging in all issues, even what is deemed to be rather contentious in a very frank, friendly manner. So, we have built that consensus not to just use this forum, ASEAN as just for diplomatic and peaceful resolution, which is very critical. I think we have passed that even in the more contentious issue like Myanmar. We have that consensus to reach an agreement through five-point consensus, we are working towards it. I think Miss Julie Bishop will probably highlight that in a bit.

But then for this year, the understanding or the consensus is to focus first on the ASEAN Energy Grid, an alternative energy that covers the whole of former Indochina, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines and including the undersea power cable from Sarawak. Which means that's sort of a more pragmatic way of resolving more or less our economic demands because of the huge interest data centres in place, because the requirements for water and electricity is now critical. So, we have to address that, at the same time deal with climate issues notwithstanding what others think or

feel, we in ASEAN feel that this is our priority. This is something which is critical for our future.

Then second is connectivity – digital includes Artificial intelligence (AI). So, the region is now focusing on this issue so that there's better understanding between these countries. But again, the fundamentals still remain economic. People say of course they are contending forces, competing among ourselves, not necessarily, so because we share and I think there's enough of interest into the region, Malaysia and the region generally being attractive. We are more concerned also about the principle of inclusivity, we have to be sustainable by there has to be inclusive, which means we do not neglect countries. We tend to engage and form formula policy that will benefit one another because if you do not cater for that, then there will not be peace and tranquility among neighbours as you have seen in the case of Myanmar.

So, I think I would end there but by reiterating an earlier point which is very critical, which many people have in my meetings in Africa, Middle East and of course Europe and America, people have underestimated that importance of building that sort of trust of working together, focusing on these fundamentals. As a trading country, Malaysia as a trading region, we take that position that we should continue to

engage and attract American investors, Europe in a more aggressive manner, China which is very important as our neighbour and continue to do so with countries like Australia, India, etc. And I think this is what we call in ASEAN centrality that we are able to engage and navigate, of course more precarious. The problem is not our problem, it is forced upon us and we should not be compelled to take position against anyone. Thank you.

Question 2

I would like to go back to Prime Minister Ibrahim, you listened to the other participants in the panel. You heard what also Julie Bishop said and Professor Yunus on importance of breaking the impasse when it comes to Myanmar. Is there any realistic path towards getting back on track? Or we just have to be extremely patient? That's one question. The other question is also related to the single market because there has been a lot of talk of integrating and creating a real market among ASEAN countries. Where do you really think it stands today? How deep is it today and how deep should it be and how fast will it become as deep as you think it should be? And

maybe the third question, ASEAN is economic success today and the growth is much higher than the 3.3% that is the global growth that we expect this year. In Europe, we expect 1%. So that's a lot or more, but how to make sure that this also continues in the future, not to get complacent. So, three easy questions for you, Prime Minister.

Answer:

Thank you. I would start with the, I mean the response to my colleague from Prime Minister Vietnam, you must have an ambitious target. It's not just going through the same process which we have been successful at in ASEAN, but that's ambitious. That's why we bring in new issues, AI, digital, you know, and to make sure that it is inclusive. So, I think that relates to the, Professor Yunus' question about how do we foresee the future and also are we stuck to the peasant set of policies imposed by others? No, not necessarily.

We have asked for the reform or multilateral institutions, but more so we have to set in the case because most of our countries now look at sustainability in a different light. Of

course, climate concern for the excesses in and protecting our environment. But what is important as referred to is sustainability in a sense that we cater for issue of values and that's of course actually different from what others think.

Values and issue of justice of issue or correcting the imbalance. And most countries have that sort of a mantra now and introduce policies that would ensure that not the small coteries of oligarchs and cronies amass wealth at the expense of the vast majority.

Now back to Myanmar. Myanmar, I mean of course thank the delegations for this. We are progressing cautiously. I mean the first positive indication in the last few months is the preparedness to engage and I assured them through colleagues and our agencies, particularly intelligent agency, we're not here to impose the system governance. Even within ASEAN, a bit different, Malaysia or Singapore or Vietnam, Laos, they're quite different. You see as long as they're representative, some sort of a participatory democracy, we are not imposing.

The critical point is peace must be secured and you must not be deemed to continue these discriminatory practices or even what was deemed to be violence to be perpetrated against minorities or any groups. So, the positive side is that there has been a low key, low level engagement amongst the influential, you know, intelligence authorities to set the parameters to make sure that is also inclusive. Because delaying means sufferings for many people including refugee in Bangladesh and even Malaysia, 200,000 refugees from Myanmar, Rohingyas. This is totally atrocious to allow this to continue.

So, the Myanmar authority understands that we have to take a strong position because the failures of governance in Myanmar's impacting our peace and security. So, I am cautiously optimistic. Of course, we will coordinate with the UN on this, but ASEAN will continue to discuss this. We have agreed even to allow for countries, particularly Thailand, allowed neighbours to engage at the different level and we coordinate well.

I am again cautious. This has been going on for the last many decades is not as contentious or rancorous as in Gaza or Ukraine, but it is still problematic. It has been going on for too long. We talked about constructive engagement. I've been very cynical in the past. Those, some of us, my colleagues, we're talking about constructive engagement. What they did was to have construction projects, no constructive engagement. So, we have to make sure that the parameters are set right. Don't impose, let them have their say, engage with them and God willing we say, Insya-Allah you'll be able to overcome.