



**VERBATIM TEXT
QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

WITH

**YAB DATO' SERI ANWAR IBRAHIM
PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA**

AT

THE 39th ASIA-PACIFIC ROUNDTABLE (APR)

2ND JULY 2026 (THURSDAY) | 9:30 AM

GRAND HYATT, KUALA LUMPUR

QUESTION 1

Good morning, Prime Minister. Thank you for your speech. I'm Euan Chong from the National University of Singapore. So, I agree with a lot of what you have said. What I am curious about then is the sort of next step. You talk about having the Global South in countries that are less hurt, be more heard in global forum. So I'm wondering in that respect what Malaysia, either by itself or with its ASEAN partners intends to do about having more of these voices heard at forum like the United Nations, whether you're thinking about some form of United Nations reform? Again, I agree with you that there are many pressing concerns with security and this includes of course, our region. There are potential flashpoints from the East China Sea to the waters around Taiwan, to the South China Sea and potentially.

(Sorry, sorry, what is your question exactly?)

So my question is, what does Malaysia either by itself or with ASEAN intend to do to prevent conflict in these flashpoints? Thank you very much.

QUESTION 2

I'm Kuan Ming from Phoenix TV. I have two questions. First question is...

(Sorry, you only have one question.)

Okay, so now some scholars just hold the view that before the word fully moves toward the multipolarity, the more intense bipolar rivalry will emerge and we noticed that after Sanae Takaichi assumed office, China, Japan ties and the **Cross-Strait tensions** have intensified. So also the United States has temporarily deployed medium range missile system on Kyushu and also Japan has upgraded their military forces.

(Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you. Sorry. Thank you. I think there are many other questions. We got your question please. Like I said, there's no time for commentary. Just ask the question. Thank you. Over this side first. You raise your hand just now. No. Yes. On the side. Cambodia, I think. Yes.)

QUESTION 3

Thank you. Bradley Merg from the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace. Thank you for your wonderful words regarding optimism on the Cambodia Thailand conflict in Phnom Penh and in Bangkok, increasingly there's a view that we're at stalemate. The border is not being opened. Could you give us your thoughts insights as to how you think this might progress and what might break the current stalemate between the two capitals? Thank you.

(I think we have got enough to get the ball rolling for the first three questions Prime Minister will answer.)

ANSWER BY YAB PRIME MINISTER:

Terima Kasih. Well, Faiz promised me they will not be difficult questions. They are all the three are btw all these ASEAN countries are committed to calling for reform of multilateral institutions, not only the UN, WTO and the related agencies. I mean we talk about democracy, we talk about participation, but it doesn't apply to us. So, I think that principle is generally

universally accepted but not able to be implemented or actualized due to the position taken by the big powers. But, we'll continue to of course call for reform because it's sheer contradiction. It is a contradiction. I mean all these powers are talking about democracy, about fair engagement, justice. But, when it comes to the narrow self interest these principles ignore.

Now, you talk about potential clash in the region. I'm not an optimist. I was with Prime Minister Takaichi last month and never mind the rhetoric, but our position is clear both in my elected University of Tokyo and also in my engagement with her. We said as far as my position is concerned on the ASEAN, we want regional stability. You see. And I personally don't share this phobia about the potential threat the South China Sea. Yes, there are issues, but thus far Malaysia's position and experience has been very, I should say, meaningful exchanges with China. China, represented by Premier Li Qiang in Jakarta two years ago gave a commitment on their support for UNCLOS (*United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*) and Code of Conduct. So, why don't we use that to engage?

Malaysia is a maritime country. I've said this before and we have issues with all our neighbours. I mean, you talk about Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia and Thailand. We have some issues, we have issues with Singapore, we have issues with Brunei, Jakarta because they're maritime country, in the Philippines but the relations never made tense. And Antonio, do you agree with me? I mean, I'm not engaged in a hostile manner at all with this country. We talk about it, we ask the officers to look at it, but at no point do you use the army and escalate the tensions.

Similarly, with China. We have issues. Yes, I've talked about it to President Xi Jinping, to Premier Li Qiang, but the relations have been excellent. There has not been one major incursion or issue that would cause tension. Are there issues? Yes. Are there potential conflict? Yes. If you talk to many countries in the West. Yes. The only issue they talk about is the danger and the potential war and threat in the South China Sea. Come on. I have not experienced that. It's for us to decide. Do we underestimate the pressure threat? No. But what I'm saying is in every single international forum, this has been the

central focus. And I disagree because the engagement has been meaningful. It's been aggressive in many ways. We have said it. And I have not failed to mention the issue of Code of Conduct or South China Sea.

In all my engagement with the Chinese leaders and the response has been very reasonable to my mind. Yes, there are some issues that we need to resolve. Yes, ASEAN had taken a position on the code of conduct and yes, China has agreed. But, as Dr. Watson said, the devil is in the details. So, let us argue, I mean, issues that the border Malaysia and Brunei, for example, has been there from the time with for Malaysia, with Singapore by the time separation. But, the essential point is there must be peace. I mean, we can engage as great friends, you know, even some I will share with you with my experience with Prime Minister Lawrence Singapore is a great friend and we can exchange.

Sometimes we leave it to the Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry and we say, ignore them, let us engage directly. So, that's what happened. This can only happen among close friends. This Prime Minister team, some issue of fisheries. So,

I text Anutin, hey, what's happening? I will talk to my fisheries minister. That's how we work. And to me this is a remarkable feat in international relations. We treat one another as great friends.

With Bongbong Marcos, there were some issues about some military establishment near Sabah. He was in Delhi. So I called, hey, Bongbong, what is this? Are you waging war? Of course, I'm just joking. He said, hey, Anwar what's happening? So, we explain. I mean, that sort of engagement and trust is important. And I don't mind, for example. Yeah, I did with Prime Minister Anutin.

Now, then comes to the second question, third question on the Cambodia - Thailand issue. Is it resolved? No, not yet but at least there has been that commitment by both leaders in both countries to engage. There are difficulties of course and this is not new. I don't blame everything in the past but this is a problem of colonial powers they come and decide where the border is going to be, they're going to decide which country is going to be free. I mean I'm Prime Minister so I'm being cautious about what I have to say but these issues have now

we have to inherit this, these are legacy issues. So, I'm not, I'm not casting aspersions but the fact remains that we have to deal with this more complex, you know. I mean, I'm strong, I mean relations, I mean I mean they are great family friends I will say that. And Prime Minister Anutin, long before I became Prime Minister he treated me as a great friend not just because I'm Prime Minister so you see this bond must be cultivated and I hope the future generation leaders will realize this.

Well, there are differences of course I don't share many of their views on some international issues or domestic issues but notwithstanding. I'm not Prime Minister of their country. Even I'm Prime Minister, I can't control, I'm going to parliament, I know you're going to get hell after this and I had this so called brilliant idea being a great democrat and introducing Prime Minister's question time in Malaysia's parliament. They said Anwar... the democrat... Oh my goodness! So, every Tuesday one hour of tough questions but that's the reality which means that even in Malaysia, despite the fact that we are doing our best. We're not getting full support from everybody. That's how democracy works. Otherwise, I would choose to have to implement one policy

adopted by some countries. Easy, no opposition. If you have elections, 98.9% support you. Otherwise, there not be elections.

Sometime, I was reflecting how easy would be, you know no headaches anyway now this issue of intensification of tension between Japan and China but to me it's unfortunate. It's not for Japan alone for China to decide it's for regional peace and security. You see, so whatever is being said and voiced must take into consideration the situation in the region and the region invited ASEAN is an exemplary unique regional setting that is relatively most peaceful and most vibrant economically. Our interest is to protect our people and therefore whatever is being said by leaders of the region must not compromise on this principle. I'm not suggesting that they cannot disagree, but they must continue engaged and must commit themselves to this regional peace.

Well, that is a position that we take. And that's why I said we are fiercely independent and the centrality means we must continue to engage. I'm not underestimating the issues or the problems or potential conflicts, but I disagree with the point

taken by many of the other powers outside that want us only to talk about potential conflicts.

No, our relations with our neighbors even with the Philippines there are of course issues but our relations still excellent we give full endorsement support to all their initiatives as ASEAN Chair with China I want not only to continue these relations strongly but to enhance further in all areas. I mean the fact of the distrust by some other countries is not our problem.

We want to engage because we think that this region must continue to advance peace. Thank you.

QUESTION 4:

Thank you Prime Minister, Dharma from Ritsumeikan University. Quick question with Southeast Asia becoming really dependent on critical digital technologies and infrastructure, how would you say the Malaysia and other Southeast Asian states could exercise agency in such a such a complex and interdependent issue? Thank you.

QUESTION 5:

Thank you Prime Minister Anwar, for your comprehensive candid and critical speech. Malaysia and perhaps ASEAN are repositioning as a middle power. My question is, how can we achieve that goal? Thank you.

QUESTION 6:

Hello. Thank you, Prime Minister as a middle power, I think this question is a little similar to the men before. How does Malaysia position itself as part of the larger effort to make effective and meaningful change to the world order? Okay, thank you.

QUESTION 7:

Prime Minister, my name is Munir Suman I'm from Bangladesh. Looking beyond ASEAN, how would you like to expand your relationship and cooperation and engagement with South Asia?

QUESTION 8:

Great to see you, Dr. Faiz and your excellency, Prime Minister such an honor. Is that Brian there? That's me. Okay. All right. Great powers increasingly seem to wield principle cynically as a matter of transaction and also self interest, advancement to what extent do principles and norms still matter for middle powers like Malaysia? Thank you very much.

ANSWER BY YAB PRIME MINISTER:

I better stop soon. Questions are getting more complex and difficult. Some questions are more difficult the opposition MPs now on digital infrastructure you're right because we are very dependent I mean and I'm fortunate to say that there's huge new investments from United States and emerging one from China and some other countries this huge investment for Infineon from Germany, quite Nvidia from United States and we'll continue.

That's why I say the centrality is critical not only as a matter of foreign policy but also for to be attractive to investments and to be considered as friends to all.

Now, how do you then protect our interests? You know, the Cloud Act has created some issues because President Trump have said that those companies established in the United States have the right to penetrate and get all the data from countries that they invest further as their decision nothing can be done but for us to protect then we must then for countries for critical security and personal information, personal data then we need to set up a sovereign cloud.

A sovereign cloud that be able to have firewalls to protect some, not all I mean most of the information should open to all but I think that to my mind is the ingenious way to protect our people and our interests but at the same time to accept the fact in the globalized world there are limits to such protection because as a free democratic country, it's an open access.

There are of course issues and problems about the excesses, abuses of this free exchanges and use of the social media I'm not going to necessarily to deny or to ignore the potential issues faced regarding the issue of abuse either involving

excesses in terms of either political or economic or personal or sexual abuse.

So there must be legitimate protection of our own people, particularly the young from being exposed to this. Now quite a number of questions related to Malaysia's immidial power I from my humble background have learnt one thing about humility I do not portray ourselves as a great power we are a small country, that's why we engage very closely with our neighbors there will strength lies not only Malaysia's potential but also ASEAN potential and beyond that we continue to engage with all countries that choose to be friendly to us.

So whether we would like to say that we are emerging as a middle power, I would say that let us evolve together as a region because for small countries to emerge as middle power could be very challenging.

Now similarly, the question about how would Malaysia be able to affect change in the international order or the world order is too ambitious what I want to do always I say, as Prime Minister

I would like to make sure that I can affect change, effective reform in my country, good governance, the country of endemic corruption and don't associate Malaysia with just one 1MDB because the excesses of the past.

Let us use power to champion the cause of our common men and women let us ensure that every single citizen have a right to basic education, health and let this gross inequality between the elite and the very rich and the poor reduced I mean, these are issues that I think must start and hope and I'm not therefore too ambitious to try and change the world.

But we take positions of course, if they say is this conflict fair then we take opposition but my focus of course is still domestic I want to showcase as a majority Muslim country, we don't represent this new conservative, oppressive position against others.

We hate this campaign against Islam in the West the Islamophobia or xenophobia for that matter everything Chinese, everything Indian is all the legacy of colonial mindset

but at the same time, we must protect our people and educate them not to have the same attitude towards the others.

That's why I always recall this brilliant short paper this is by the great Christian Arab Scholar Edward Syne when he talked about clash of ignorance. We have so many divisions West, East, Islam, Hinduism or Christian Buddhism but it's not clash of civilization is a clash of ignorance.

You ask them, you know to explain half a paragraph or two minutes about the others they don't understand but they form a judgment. I've engaged when I was teaching Georgetown University this is a brilliant place I mean, excellent for exchanges and, you know, meetings but you realize that some are genuinely interested, fair, but some are just clearly prejudiced.

But it's not in the United States even here they don't like the west or they don't like the others even here among, you know, Muslims and Christians and Hindus and Buddhists at times

this clash is not based on any semblance of understanding but a clash of ignorance.

No, we cannot clash due to ignorance there must be exchange due to understanding. That's why in the Islamic terminology, in the Quranic terminology is very important it doesn't say tolerance it says *lita'arafu* which means you know appreciate knowing one another there are differences of tribes or race or color and creed.

But *lita'arafu* to understand, appreciate and know one another is difference in terms of terminology, nuances what tolerance means and what knowing one another means knowing doesn't mean you necessarily follow or agree but know, some show some appreciation I think this issue is to me very important I'm more conscious of it as in a country is multiracial, multi-religious here we have large number of Buddhist and Christians and Hindus and enemies and of course the majority are Muslims so there is that emphasis that being given.

That's why we call our national framework is MADANI yes excellence in technology, AI, quantum computing, blah, blah but you must not lose sight of humanity and values. Now what about those outside ASEAN? Tarique Rahman Prime Minister Bangladesh was here last week, Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul is coming next week but we have engaged as great friends Bangladesh's potential and now it is more peaceful this is a country I told him he's a country of too much biplop and Shangram in Bengali means too much revolution.

So I said, you can reduce that a bit then they are now like what they are doing now is focusing on economic development, education, public health and of course attracting investments and we want to play a role we need their experience and expertise and they need ours.

So we, we have to enhance it we have excellent relations with India, Australia so I think when I talk about ASEAN because these are our immediate neighbors and this big regional fortress that has been there, has worked and we need to fortify strengthen it. But at the same time we continue so we have ASEAN plus three plus seven, whatever secret general is

talking about very complex but the whole principle is engaging you know ASEAN China, ASEAN United States I remember when convening ASEAN last year, you can imagine when we have then ASEAN with President Trump then ASEAN with Xi Jinping then ASEAN with Modi.

Oh my goodness. You can imagine as we see then it's very complex, but it is to my mind a brilliant not by me by my predecessors and by the wisdom of the regional leaders to realize that we must have this but not in isolation this fortress but engaging aggressively with the others *arigato gozaimasu*.

QUESTION 9:

Thank you. Prime Minister, I'm from Brunei Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies. I think your position on multilateralism is clear. Just wanted to know what your view on unilateralism is. And do you think that ASEAN should consider unilateral approaches to be more effective, or does that necessarily threaten ASEAN centrality? Thank you.

QUESTION 10:

Your honourable Prime Minister, I have a question. So emerging middle powers often call for collective action. But it is easier said than done. What, in your opinion, is the main challenge, and how can we overcome that to accelerating our agency? Thank you.

QUESTION 11:

Thank you, Prime Minister, for a brilliant speech. It seems that Europe is having a real offer for Malaysia these days. Is Malaysia going to seize this opportunity with the European Union?

QUESTION 12:

Thank you, Prime Minister. You gave a very powerful speech. So my question is, considering with what happened in the Middle East, I think it impacted lots of countries in Southeast Asia. Do you think it's possible for the Southeast Asian

country to create a shock breaker mechanism for it, and how Malaysia could become like a driving force behind it? Thank you. I'm from Indo Pacific Strategic Intelligence, Indonesia.

ANSWER BY YAB PRIME MINISTER:

Now. This question, Brunei, we talk about multilateralism, but we also talk ASEAN, which is minilateralism. We talk about OIC, we talk about BRICS, of course, some bilateral mechanisms and RCEP and TPP. They are all also, in a way, minilateralism. So as long as minilateralism does not necessarily go against the entire spirit and basis of multilateralism, to my mind, it is consistent because, for example, I have a bilateral meeting example with Anutin. He's bilateral, but it's always in the ASEAN context. We do not jeopardize the ASEAN principles.

I'm calling for greater engagement with Myanmar because I think it's time that, since they have made some adjustments, that we move forward aggressively in engaging with them. But I'm also always mindful of the five point consensus. Now they make some arrangements, then we move forward. But again,

I don't believe that we can impose strongly no country. Malaysia will not, like any other, either region or sub region or international community, to impose standards, which I think runs contrary to the interests of our country. So there must be some mechanism where we continue to aggressively engage.

Now, Yes, we need some collective action in many of these conflicts. I mean, you can't ignore the Sudan. As you say, there are limits. Of course. That's why I have said repeatedly that the urgency, the call, the consistent voice, coherent voice is important. You see, some countries say, for example, I'm probably to some very sensitive issues. We have countries, even ASEAN. Oh, welcome to Ukraine. Everybody lambasted. It's not fair nowadays, atrocities in Ukraine, but you know, saying in Gaza, completely silent when it comes. So it, for me, is, I wouldn't say in a crude manner, but certainly it's not consistent. How is it that you can mention Ukraine, and you ignore this 70 years of colonization? All our countries here fought against colonial powers, but when it comes to some countries where colonization is okay, so what hypocrisy is this?

That's why, even within ASEAN, we have to negotiate and should engage to get better understanding on these issues. We had a meeting, for example, ASEAN, GCC. But, you know, sometimes when it comes to engagement, ASEAN is par excellence. We can somehow retry and resolve, although we may water down some of these resolutions. But we did achieve some sort of a consensus.

But to my mind, it's important. That is why it must be. You talk about rules based, but you're so moral based, ethical based. What is this growth and development if they devoid of moral and ethical values? We talk about humanity, different religions, different creed, different races, different regions. Yeah, it doesn't matter. But there's certain concerns about humanitarian values that you, you have exalted, what we call exalted, the children of Adam "walaqad karamna bani Adam".

And that recognition must be there. That is why I think we must remain consistent in some of these issues. Then, when we talk about these issues, then you get better respectability and consensus. And even when political leaders sometimes

have to navigate protected by their own interests, then the public will have a better, hopefully better understanding.

Now you talk about Malaysia and EU. This unfortunate incident with the Norwegian stance against our procurement, of course, will not necessarily affect our relations with the EU. Because immediately when I wrote all letters to the EU leaders, I said, is this how you treat us? President Macron sent a personal note to me to say, no, look, this does not represent EU position. Meloni, Italy, also said the same thing. We will continue. That does not represent our position. In Germany, the same manner. So that's why I. I don't think we should. It's fair to be to generalize, but is it a fair position taken? No reasons given. In fact, I did speak to him, the Prime Minister of Norway. Say "Anwar, security consideration." You think we are selling these missiles to Al Qaeda? I mean, read it. Come on. We have such relations in the past. We have not. We had engagement arrangements with umpteen countries. So we even checked with the United States, and United States gave a clear position that, no The United States did not influence or pressure them. No.

So, you see, people will say, well, why. Why do I choose to defend the United States? I'm not defending United States, I'm giving the facts. The facts remain there because we were not sure because we thought, you see, because of this long understanding relationship with the United States, we say, oh, must be United States. Norway could not have acted on their own. Must be United States pressure.

But we were wrong. And we acknowledged that we were wrong after getting a clear position from the United States, Secretary of Defence, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Secretary Rubio and to say that no, no, United States have no objection because they are also selling weapons to us.

Okay? So don't worry. EU, your reps here, you're safe for now. I'm joking. I'm joking now.

Now you talking about Middle East. We call it West Asia. Why? Why call it Middle East? From where? From London. The Middle East from here. Where's the Middle and East?

Middle East, Beijing. That's our east. I'm not fighting over there.

You see how strong is the influence, the London influenza. Middle East. I grew up. I said, Middle. Yes, Middle East. East from where? From Malaysia. East. That's west. It's okay. That's what my colonial masters told me. So it's Middle East. But we try, see Malaysia, we say, where's Asia? Nobody agrees, doesn't matter. It gives us some satisfaction.

I go everywhere. I was in Tokyo University, Tokyo. West Asia. Everybody's blinking. I say, in bracket, Middle East, although it's far west from Tokyo. This is a complex world. I'm not going to win this battle. But I'm just trying to provoke.

So do we have mechanism to resolve? Again, Malaysia is far away. Our advantage is only one. We engage with all the countries, the government. In fact, after the initial outbreak, of course, we are engaging. We continue to engage with United States, but more so the Gulf countries. With every single Gulf

country leader, I engaged to tell them, look one peace, whatever you want us to engage because Malaysia, one of the few countries that continue to engage also with Iran.

So from what I gather, and then engage with Iran, then I went there. But when Pakistan took the lead, we gave full support to Pakistan and then Qatar and Turkey to see that, you know, what has been conveyed. And we did convey our part. So we played a minor, minor role just to support the principle of peaceful coexistence, but to expect to play a much bigger role. No, we are not in the position to. We will endorse and give whatever support is required.

Constantly engaging with Shehbaz Sharif, The Prime Minister of Pakistan, giving all the encouragement and support, even with Iran. Some countries, of course, not too happy. But I see, how do you engage? I can call all Gulf leaders with El-Sisi of Egypt and Erdoğan of Turkey, but I cannot speak to President Iran.

I don't share that view. I do convey. I mean, the fact some like or dislike is not my issue. In fact, for the funeral of Khomeini tomorrow in Tehran, we're sending our Culture Minister to represent the country. Of course, I was invited. I think since I'm invited here. So between going to Tehran and being here, I chose here. See how important you guys are.

Thank you very much again.