

**TRANSCRIPT OF SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE DR MALIKI  
OSMAN'S QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOLLOWING THE  
KEYNOTE ADDRESS AT THE 33<sup>RD</sup> ASEAN ROUNDTABLE  
26 NOVEMBER 2018**

**Moderator:** Ladies and gentlemen, I think that SMS Dr Maliki had covered a lot of ground. Not just the 1,000 meetings, but in the period of this one year, I think there has been progress on the security front, there's been progress in terms of the humanitarian front - many responses that the ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance Centre has done - and there's been movement on economic integration as well as in digital initiatives. And of course, SMS also briefed us on initiatives for the future, which involve the youth. We have about 35 minutes left in this opening session, I know many of you have actually given some questions beforehand but we'd very much like you to ask those questions personally. While you're reflecting and getting ready to ask your questions, I will just start off with my first, more obvious question. And that is really to ask Dr Maliki, among all those different areas, what does he feel personally is the most, the one that gives him the greatest excitement for having done this one year.

**SMS:** I think a lot has been done. I hold both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Defence portfolios. I thought the defence sector has done tremendous work. I've always been concerned about regional security, and one of the reasons why we decided on the theme of innovation and resilience is to acknowledge that there are challenges that we face and how we can capitalise on those challenges. But I thought we've had significant progress in the defence front and the security front. It's not easy to get militaries together, to coordinate, to work together, exercise together in a space that's very congested. The Southeast Asian region and the larger Asia region are very congested, and we need to work together. And last year, as I mentioned in my speech, we concluded CUES, the Code on Unplanned Encounters at Sea, and all ADMM and ADMM-Plus countries supported that. And this year, we were able to then move forward on GAME. I think this shows that overall, ASEAN's processes have always been about moving forward - capitalising on what we already are able to establish; yet at the same time learn from those experiences and develop further, and take one step at a time. There will always be challenges along the way, but my own personal take is really the process, rather than just simply the outcome. We will not be able to achieve significant outcomes unless we acknowledge the processes, and the processes require a lot of negotiations. Yet, at the same time, it is based on trust that has been built over time. This is not just one night's efforts, this is where the yearly meetings between the Ministers, between the staffers, have helped build that relationship over time, and allowed us to come with significant deliverables and outcomes. So personally, when I observe what happens over the one year, I like to look at the processes. And I think we have put in place very stable processes

within ASEAN to be able to move forward and overcome potential resistance that may exist, or encumbrances, or challenges that may come.

**Question:** Good morning, my name is Huong, Ambassador of Vietnam to Singapore. Throughout this year, we have seen many challenges. Despite this, Singapore's Chairmanship for ASEAN 2018 has been a big success, as we have seen. You have mentioned, Minister Maliki, about how you worked with the ASEAN members and partners. In your point of view, what are the keys for this success?

**Question:** Dr Maliki, your speech spurred me to ask these two questions. First question is that I'm sure not only Singapore, but many businesses were disappointed with the failure of RCEP taking off. How are you sure that this is going to be not only for Thailand to carry on, and it goes on and on and on. Because we know this - this has happened. The second question is about security. Now we have pledged to be neutral. But this is difficult, and the sense that if there is an unpredictable chap, and he is saying that "his country first". How are we going to be neutral? And there are a lot of confusion, although you can send their fleet around. But then do you think eventually Singapore will have to choose? Thank you.

**Moderator:** Could you let everybody know your name?

**Question:** I am Adrian and I am a Singaporean of Filipino descent. I am a security and business analyst motivated by Professor Wang Gungwu.

**Question:** Good morning Dr Maliki, Victor Mills from Singapore International Chamber of Commerce. One of the challenges that ASEAN has got is to make the increasing connectivity at governmental level real for the citizens of each member state. And that all the more important given the demographics when you talked in your speech about one in three citizens of ASEAN being the youth, the young people. What more can member states do in conjunction with the business communities to make ASEAN more real for the men and women in the street? Thank you.

**SMS:** First, on the question by the Vietnamese Ambassador, thank you so much for the question. If I understand your question, it is what are the key success factors for ASEAN as we move forward. ASEAN is 51 years old and if we look at the 51 years of history, we have evolved from five nations to ten nations subsequently. I always go back to the basic fundamentals of why and how ASEAN was formed in the first place. I was an infant at that time when ASEAN was formed in 1967; but we grew up learning about what it was like at that time. And the reason why ASEAN was formed is really about creating a safe and secure

environment for the region, for all of us to move forward together. It started out as a region that was tumultuous with a lot of tensions amongst the neighbouring countries. For example, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore – we had Konfrontasi; in Indo-China, there was the Vietnam War - many things were happening at that time. And I think one of the things that made us successful was the foresight of our founding leaders at that time. They had the foresight to be able to see the importance of putting aside the individual differences for the benefit of our people. For the benefit of our next generation and subsequent generations, we should put aside our personal idiosyncrasies, ideas or interests and put forward regional safety and security architecture that is meant to help us grow. And that led to specific principles like unity of ASEAN, ASEAN Centrality, and non-interference in local domestic politics. These are not easy to move on to, and that has been the criticism of some about ASEAN too. Because of all these then it is very difficult for you to move forward, and you have to have a consensus. But that in itself is a strength because I think subsequent generations of leaders of all ASEAN countries hold on to these principles. So it may be slow in terms of progress in different areas, but we move forward.

I think that trust has been imbued in our DNA - whatever we do, at all levels, we talk about building trust with each other. And I think that's critical for ASEAN, and to me, that is a key success factor. That is one of the reasons why we facilitate the 1,000 over meetings. The 1,000 over meetings are not just about meetings, it is about ensuring that everyone at all different levels of the sectoral, and even at the staffers' level, learn to build trust and learn to build strong relationships, so that negotiations later on can be one of mutual benefit rather than "you win, I lose". It is all of us winning at the same time. I think that is how I see the success factors of ASEAN. And in our chairmanship, we acknowledged the fact that even in such an uncertain world which we are facing today, we need to acknowledge the challenges we are facing and therefore resilience becomes critical. And I think it is important for us to reflect on what are some of the key ingredients we have in ASEAN that will keep us resilient. And resilience is really about being able to come out from any difficult situation. I think that we are able to do so because of the many, many years that we had building the relationship.

On the security issue that Adrian spoke of, one is the potential tensions and unpredictable actions - and there is always that possibility. But what we do is we continue to work together in the military and defence sector. That is why we facilitated and participated in military exercises in different parts of the region. I spoke about the ASEAN-China Maritime Exercise recently, which we facilitated. We will have an ASEAN-US Maritime Exercise next year - two major exercises. But in between we've always had regular exercises between militaries at different levels, in particular the Air Forces, the Navy, the Army - basically to enhance inter-operability, build trust and confidence. Our service chiefs have regular

platforms where they meet. Again, the issue of building trust when we engage our partners, the ADMM plus partners, on regular dialogues and these are very important, it's a work in progress, it's dealing with trust.

On the question of increasing connectivity by our friend from SICC, I think it's important. And we are not just talking about physical connectivity - we have to establish physical connectivity in order to be able to move, and take advantage of the potential of ASEAN economic integration. Well, you're absolutely right, government agencies can work further together, we are now talking about e-commerce for example, as one of the opportunities for us to work together. The fourth industrial revolution provides excellent opportunities for us to tap on technology, and technology knows no boundaries as it were, so I think we can work together and there has been a lot of movement in that direction in the last couple of years, including in our chairmanship year. And I'm very sure Thailand will also be interested, and in particular that they will also be interested in how they can develop e-commerce, they can develop the economic sector, for greater ASEAN integration. I talked about the ASEAN Single Window, but we need other initiatives that we are putting together. I think these are all initial initiatives that we have put in, it provides a platform for us to look at what works and continue to ride on these success factors and create greater opportunities for the whole of ASEAN to benefit.

On the question of "do we think that RCEP will actually be concluded next year?" We are of course very hopeful that it will be. This is not the first negotiation of any agreements - we've had many other experiences in negotiating agreements. When the TPP was threatened early last year by the withdrawal of the US, everyone thought "oh, that's the end", but the 11 countries came together and no one would believe that within a year, we were actually able to sign and ratify the CPTPP, and implement by 31 December this year. No one will ever imagine that. So, while we look at the challenges, we also look at our own experiences before that. And our experiences show that if we have the will, and we know what are some of the difficult areas, then we might say, "ok, some of these difficult areas, are they really that critical to hinder us?" If they're really not that critical, why don't we put it aside first? Look at things which are easy, doable, where every one of us agree. In a negotiation, sometimes in multilateral negotiations, we need to also be strategic. There's this process called 'bilateralising' the discussion, because sometimes there are just a couple of countries who have got issues, then we help them. We help them through their negotiations. So I think we are hopeful with anything that we do; I think if we start something that we are not hopeful then I think it's going to be quite difficult. We have made substantial progress and I think the countries in RCEP are committed to concluding negotiations hopefully by next year.

**Question:** Dr Maliki, I'm from the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences. My question is concerning the trade war between China and the US. So firstly, what kind of impact have or will on the side of ASEAN countries according to your evaluation? The second question is, just a few days ago, Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Hsien Loong, had said that the trade war has created circumstances that force the member states of ASEAN to have to take sides in the future and he hopes this time will come later. But my question is if the time comes, which side you will take? Thank you.

**Question:** Thank you for the sharing. I'm Jia Hui from Ministry of Defence. I just want to ask Dr Maliki on your assessments on regional politics and trends for 2019, given the upcoming Indonesian elections with Prabowo coming up in increasing Islamisation, which may be divisive for the Indonesian society. And even in our upcoming GE in Singapore, what do you think we can do to secure a fair, democratic process in terms of cyber resilience and social harmony? Thank you.

**Question:** Thank you Minister Dr Maliki, the keynote address was fantastic. My question here is, I'll like to look at the segment on youth interaction and leadership. I think that's a very important segment because our youth. My name is Michael Chow from the London Institute of Banking and Finance. My question is that will these initiatives that encourage youths amongst ASEAN, lead to greater job mobility among ASEAN? So that there's less hassle in getting employment pass among them. Thank you.

**SMS:** On the trade war and whether we'll take sides or not, you know I was just looking last night, both US and China are the two biggest economies and together they form more than one third of the world's GDP. And of course when the two of them have tensions, everywhere in the world may have already been affected, or might be affected later on. You can't run away from that possibility, yet at the same time, we shouldn't just wait and see what happens.

I think we should continue to promote a multilateral trading system. We should continue with our efforts at negotiating agreements that are multilateral, so that the principles of this open, free trade within the WTO continues to be the pillar of world economic systems. How and when the manifestation of the trade war takes place, I am hopeful that we still do not know exactly where it will turn. President Xi and President Trump will be meeting at the G20 meetings. And I think both sides understand the serious implications of current trajectories if it continues to go down that road. What is more important for the rest of us is to articulate the clarity of principles. The multilateral trading system, rather than a binary trade in goods, in a trading system that we have put together over the years - we must realise that at the end of the day, there is mutual benefit. And at the end

of the day, I think what is useful also, is for us to continue to reflect on the benefits of this multilateral trading system on our own economies. Yes, in some situations when some countries may benefit more, some may benefit less. But if you look at the whole trajectory in terms of a continuum over a life span, there are times when we would benefit, there are times when we may be affected. But I think we have to look at it from that perspective, rather than from a myopic, one-temporal dimension. This is the challenge. But it hasn't stopped us from continuing to negotiate RCEP, it's never stopped us from working with the CPTPP and to successfully do so. And all of us will continue to do so. And hopefully, in due course, the benefits of a multilateral trading system outweighs, and becomes more prominent to many other people, and we will continue to promote that.

The second question is about political leadership in the region, if I heard the question correctly. We have seen in this region, quite exciting - to say the least - political scenes. What happened in Malaysia earlier this year excites almost everybody, because you have the comeback of a lifetime. And suddenly you realise that you can be a politician at any age, to lead. And in the region, we will see elections in Indonesia, we will see elections in Thailand, and we just saw elections in Cambodia. I think that is the reality of life. Every country has its own domestic dynamics. Every country has to decide for itself, the kind of political landscape it wants or is comfortable with or has an appetite for; and of course subsequently live with the term of government that comes into power. There was a question on Indonesia and the rise of political Islam in Indonesia and the region. We have seen that, ever since the gubernatorial elections in Jakarta. Yes, I think there are movements in that direction, choices of candidate for the Vice-President also has an indication of some of the key factors taken into consideration. And we know how important this is for the region. Therefore, the region will also have to be mindful of what is being said. We need to ready ourselves, in Singapore for the implications and what does it mean. And sometimes you also are concerned about the wave of Islamic radicalism and potential influences from other parts of the world in Singapore.

But we are in no position to tell any other country how they should run their political system. And that is the uniqueness of ASEAN. And same to Singapore. I think Singapore has our definition of what democracy is, and who has a right to vote. We have elections every five years. And how it manifests itself, it's really dependent on how the people of each country see the incumbent government's ability to fulfil its promises made during its previous campaigning period, its ability to meet the needs of its people, its ability to provide the level of security, safety, comfort that people are looking out for. I think it's really what every political party in any country will have to deal with. We saw what happened last night in the news from Taiwan, for example. So all these things are dynamic moving parts in terms of politics.

From Singapore's perspective, we've always believed that our role is first, to ensure that we deliver on our promises. Now what have we always been promising? We've promised political stability, economic growth, meeting the needs of our people. And we continue to deliver these basic promises that we provide Singaporeans and to give them hope for the future.

And so now this leads me to answer the question on the future and what awaits the youth of ASEAN. I think we know that the future is always in the hands of young people. The question is really, how much are we prepared to be ready to give young people that ownership? The ASEAN Youth Fellowship, and other various initiatives that we have put in place, is an extension of many of our own domestic initiatives, how we want to give young people ownership. But we also must acknowledge that when we talk about engaging young people, we cannot say that we know young people as they know themselves. I have two young adult children, one 20, one 23, and I'm sure many of us have got kids around that age. Raising them, you think you know who they are, but every time you wake up in the morning, you're not sure whether it is the same person that you are saying good morning to, because they have their own minds, they have their own lifestyles, they have their own way of doing things. The way they use technology is something that is the best example. I worry because we grew up with our parents telling us never get into a car with a stranger. Today with Grab, they get in a car with a stranger five, six times a day. And they have no qualms doing so. So when we talk about giving young people the space and ownership, we must be prepared to let go. We must be prepared to say, "Alright, that's your space". But we also must be prepared for them to fail. And so, when they fail, how do we react to that?

And in the new world order, failing is actually one of the ingredients I was told for you to succeed later. Because unless we fail, we will not learn how to succeed later. So I think that is critical for us even in this generation. So one of the challenges about government and engagement of young people, has always been how much do we give, and how much are we prepared to let loose and make them succeed a little bit later on amidst going through several challenges. So in ASEAN, I hope we will be able to also look at that framework as we encourage young people to take greater ownership. We must also guide them along the way. The challenge with us – the older folks, I consider myself the older folks also – is that we always think that we have seen a lot, that we think what you are saying is not going to work. But I think we have to slowly bite our tongue a little bit in that process, and let them learn through their own experiences as well as the journey they are going to travel. The journey they are going to take is different from the journey we have taken. That itself is something we have to accept. So I think working with young people is not going to be as easy as we think it is, but

we just need to give them that space to thrive and to fail and thrive again. And hopefully through that process they know what it means to lead either their own organisations, their own companies and even later on their own countries.

**Moderator:** The Minister has kindly agreed to add five minutes to the Q&A time. We have about nine minutes left. I am only going to give two more final questions from anyone from the floor because I am going to keep the third question for myself. So for the two, I know there are many ambassadors who actually had questions. There is one, the lady and then the gentlemen here. Sorry to the rest. Keep it short please. So the lady, can you put up your hand? Okay.

**Question:** Good morning. Really glad to hear about the smart cities network. I wanted to understand what are the drivers behind this initiative and my second question relating to that would be what do you see the role of private sector in this initiative. Thank you so much.

**Moderator:** Yes, the gentleman.

**Question:** Thank you Mr Chair. I am from the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences. My question is about the non-traditional security cooperation between China and ASEAN. Personally I don't think there is a real and bigger development in this issue. So my question is that how do you see of the development in this issue and what suggestion do you have on this issue. Thank you.

**Moderator:** Could you be a bit more specific? Which aspect of non-traditional security development?

**Question:** There are so many specific problems. For example, terrorism, you mentioned several times in your first speech, more cooperation about this issue of terrorism.

**Moderator:** Specifically, with China?

**Question:** Yes, between China and ASEAN. Thank you.

**Moderator:** Third question?

**Question:** SMS, thank you for your insights. I would like to ask for one more insight please. Say in aviation, strong headwinds can delay the aircraft despite the best engines and the best flight plan. So what is holding up RCEP? What is it? And we say next year, how much of it is just optimism or hope? What are the factors which will make ASEAN deliver this? Thank you.



**Moderator:** And SMS, sorry I am going to add on to the burden. I see that this is the last six minutes. My question goes back to what you said about the beginnings of ASEAN. I think ASEAN was birthed in challenging times. I think now that we are in this particular period, we see the EU going through these challenges. Brexit is going to happen soon and I think there are some problems with Italy. There are also many EU countries that are having problems convincing their own people of the European project. Of course that is the European project, but what does that mean for ASEAN? Do you see ASEAN still pursuing... it used to adopt the EU as a model? Where do we go from here? Maybe that could be your concluding answer.

**SMS:** Ok, the question on smart cities network and the drivers. I think that is where we saw the potential for the Fourth Industrial Revolution. That is where technology - AI, data analytics... those are the drivers. Because in Singapore we acknowledge that these are the things that will bring us forward. We can't run away from it and we shouldn't run away from it; in fact, we should embrace it. And I think the other driver is really urbanisation. We are seeing movements; rural-urban migration in many of our cities and city-living is going to be one of the key aspects in the modern world and future. And many cities will have to deal with urban planning, city planning. And in today's world, with the advent of technology and the technological revolution, it is only right that we ride on these opportunities so that urban-living and city-living becomes liveable. In Singapore's experience for example, liveability is one of the key elements of our urban planning. And with our experience, we thought it's useful to also enhance the opportunity so that we can actually build upon economic development and opportunities at the same time because with technology you can actually have better connectivity via technology. And so the private sector has an extremely important role to play because solutions do come from the private sector. And there are a lot of tech companies that are coming up with solutions – solutions with regards to your traffic congestion issues, solutions with regards to your e-payment mechanisms and how we can then link up say e-commerce, e-payments across different cities. And I think those are really the drivers behind why the smart cities network is one of the key deliverables in our ASEAN chairmanship. We thought that it is one way to provide hope for many of our ASEAN member countries as we tap on their energies of young people. I visited Indonesia recently. The amount of capabilities in IT is tremendous. I go to Vietnam to see equally, many young people very much enthused by all these opportunities. We started with 26 cities and I hope we will be able to expand that. The 26 cities are doing well, and there are 33 partnerships already within seven months. I think that is the way to go moving forward.

On non-traditional security, I think there is nothing stopping us. I think the issue really is... I go back to 1,000 meetings a year in ASEAN and it is really an issue of where, how, and at what levels we start engaging. And I think we do engage China and many other countries in many of these different sectorals. As for whether you raise it at the highest level, at the ministers' level, or you raise it at the different tracks first - because the different tracks will give you an indication of where the interests are, it is also dependent on the significance of those issues at that point in time. Terrorism, I think, knows no boundaries, and we know that. And we've been discussing terrorism in this region for a long time. I spoke about "Our Eyes Initiative" in ASEAN where we are working towards an information-sharing mechanism. That is very critical. If we look at news in Singapore, we have been able to thwart many potential terror attempts because of information sharing. These are areas that we can work together with China and many other countries.

Question on RCEP again. To be honest with you, really, it is not quite easy to pin down where and what will be the final straw that will get RCEP moving forward. But I think the commitment is what is most important. And RCEP countries are committed to finding a conclusion by next year. And I think that is where we should hold our hopes on. If it doesn't happen, then at the ASEAN Roundtable next year, we will probably get the same question. But I go back to what I said earlier about this not being the first negotiation of a multilateral free trade agreement. And RCEP is really an agreement amongst ASEAN and its FTA partners. So they already have their FTAs bilaterally - ASEAN and its FTA partners. So I think the foundation is already there. You just need to look at some of the thorny issues and how we can actually overcome those thorny issues.

Final question on the EU. I think ASEAN's outlook has always been that we must continue to engage every region, whatever that region's challenges are. We must be there, so that we also understand these challenges. So that when they ride out those challenges, when they ride out the journey, we are always with them and a part of them. And I have always looked at it from the perspective that there are always bright sparks in some of these things. It does not mean that the EU is going to go through so many challenges that you cannot do anything with the EU at this point in time. So that is our key interest moving forward. Singapore will be the ASEAN-EU country coordinator. We will work together with our EU counterparts to bring this relationship forward. We have signed the EU-Singapore FTA. We look forward to that being a pathfinder for an ASEAN-EU FTA. We are now negotiating the air agreement with the EU. Whatever happens with the EU and Brexit at this point in time, I do not think it should limit our ability to continue to engage the EU. I think we should continue to engage them. The EU, as with any other part of the world, will also undergo a period of leadership transition. All the more we should get to know and work with the various

stakeholders in this region to be able to ensure that ASEAN's interest is also well-known in that region. I think that is critical for all of us.

So I want to end off by thanking everyone for giving me this opportunity to share my thoughts. Looking forward, Singapore stands ready to work with fellow ASEAN Member States and support Thailand as the next chair, and support subsequent chairs, for us to continue to bring a brighter future for the people of ASEAN. Thank you so much.

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