

Public Forum

- Date:** Monday, 19 October 2015
- Venue:** School of International Studies,
Peking University.
- Topic:** China's Comprehensive Reforms and the
Building of an Inclusive Asian Community
of Shared Future.
- Speaker:** Tommy Koh, Leader of the Singapore
Delegation to the 10th China-Singapore
Forum.

Salutations

Professor Wang Yizhou, Ambassador Ashok Mirpuri, distinguished members of the Chinese and Singapore delegations to the 10th China-Singapore Forum, professors and students of Peking University, ladies and gentlemen.

A Historic Year

2015 is a historic year. We mark the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the Pacific War. We celebrate the 70th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. We also celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Singapore. I led the Singapore delegation to negotiate with a distinguished Chinese delegation led by the then Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Xu Dunxin, on a Memorandum of Understanding to establish formal diplomatic relations. Twenty five years later, relations between our two countries are warm, comprehensive and substantive, anchored on a high degree of mutual trust and confidence. To celebrate this happy occasion, the President of Singapore, Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam, had a very successful State Visit to China in July. We eagerly await the visit of President Xi Jinping to Singapore in November.

Topic of the Forum

The topic of our forum consists of two parts. My colleague, Professor Tan Kong Yam, has focused his remarks on China's comprehensive reforms. I will focus on the second part: "The building of an inclusive Asian community of shared future". This topic is taken from the theme of the Boao Forum's Asia Annual Conference for 2015, which is "Asia's New Future: Towards a Community of Common Destiny".

I have read carefully the keynote address delivered by President Xi Jinping at the Boao Forum. President Xi's key message is that China wishes to work with other Asian countries in order to build a community of common destiny and usher in a new future for Asia.

Honouring Deng Xiaoping

I met President Xi Jinping, when he was serving as China's Vice-President, in November 2010, in Singapore. I was the Chairman of Singapore's National Heritage Board. We had put up a marker and a bust to honour Deng Xiaoping, who had visited Singapore twice in his life time. We had invited our founding Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew and Vice-President Xi Jinping to be the joint Guests-of-Honour, at the unveiling ceremony. I will always treasure the memory of that occasion. I invite friends from China to visit the marker and the bust of Deng Xiaoping, which is located in front of the Asian Civilizations Museum, on the banks of the Singapore River.

ASEAN's Vision

Let me now turn to the topic of our forum. ASEAN has been working very hard, for many years, to bring the countries of Asia and the Asia-Pacific, together, both economically and

politically. What is our goal? Our goal is to build a region of peace, stability and prosperity.

Economically, ASEAN has taken the initiative in linking our economies to one another and in integrating the region. ASEAN has concluded free trade or comprehensive economic partnership agreements with China, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia, New Zealand, etc. ASEAN is also driving the negotiations for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, involving 16 countries. Hopefully with the recent conclusion of the TPP, the RCEP negotiations will pick up speed.

Politically, ASEAN recognises that there is a deficit of trust between and among many of the countries in the region. This is a threat to peace and stability and an obstacle to our goal of building an inclusive Asian community. We have therefore created the ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Plus Three and

the East Asia Summit, in order to increase mutual trust and to grow a culture of cooperation for mutual benefit.

ASEAN's Principles

ASEAN's vision of building an inclusive Asian community is based upon the following principles:

- (i) The sovereign equality of States.
- (ii) Non-interference in the internal affairs of States.
- (iii) Good neighbourliness.
- (iv) Respect for the international Rule of Law.
- (v) Disputes should be settled peacefully and in accordance with international law.
- (vi) The regional architecture should be open and inclusive.

From Vision to Reality

How to turn our vision to reality? We have to be frank and acknowledge the challenges. For example, there is a deficit of trust between China and the US, and between China and Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines and India. There is also a deficit of trust between Japan and Korea and between India and Pakistan. The status quo is however not immutable. We can change the status quo if we have the political will to do so. It is ASEAN's mission to replace distrust with trust, suspicion with mutual confidence and discomfort with comfort. I invite China to join ASEAN in this mission.

Thank you.

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